

The Greatest Love Story in Comics

MELISSA and GABRE..



by DON MCGREGOR and BILLY GRAHAM-

Ms. TREE™

No. 5

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty



MS. TREE

"THE COLD DISH"

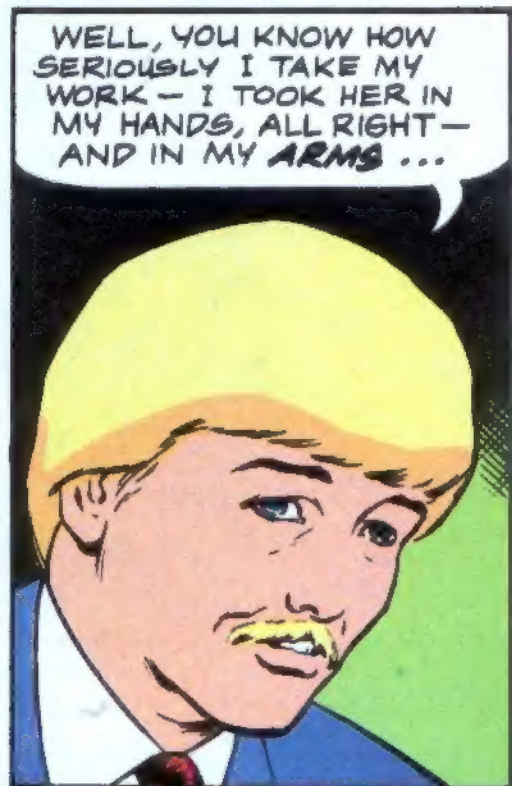
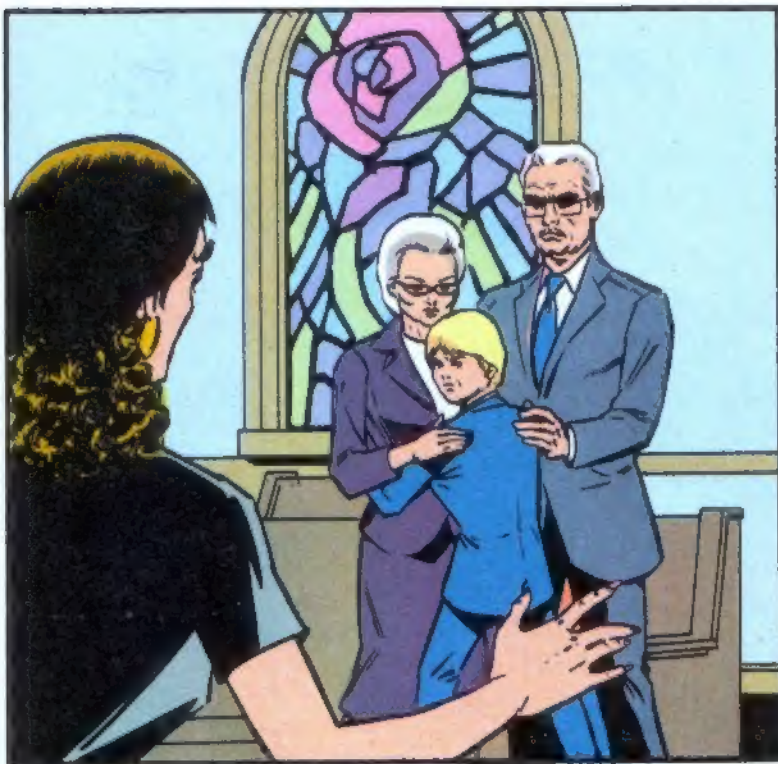
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by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

Chapter Three



ART ASSIST & LETTERING: GARY KATO / EDITOR: DEAN M. / COLORS: JAN BRUNNER





"BUT SHE'D CALLED MIKE SR. IN FOR HELP — AND HE'D SOMEHOW PUT AN END TO IT... SHE'D THOUGHT —"

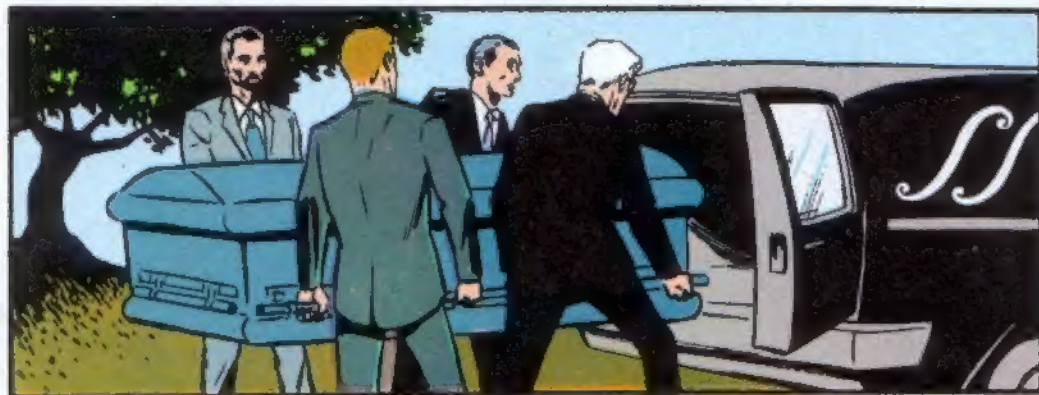
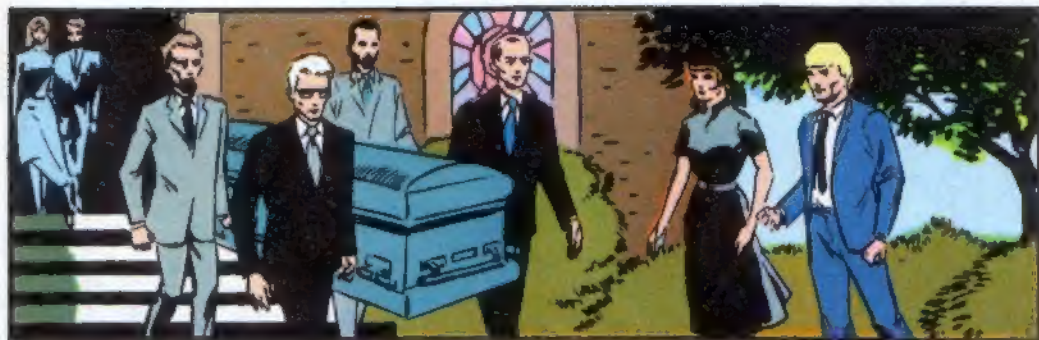


"UNTIL YOUR HUSBAND DIED THAT RAINY NIGHT — A MUERTA MURDER VICTIM HIMSELF."

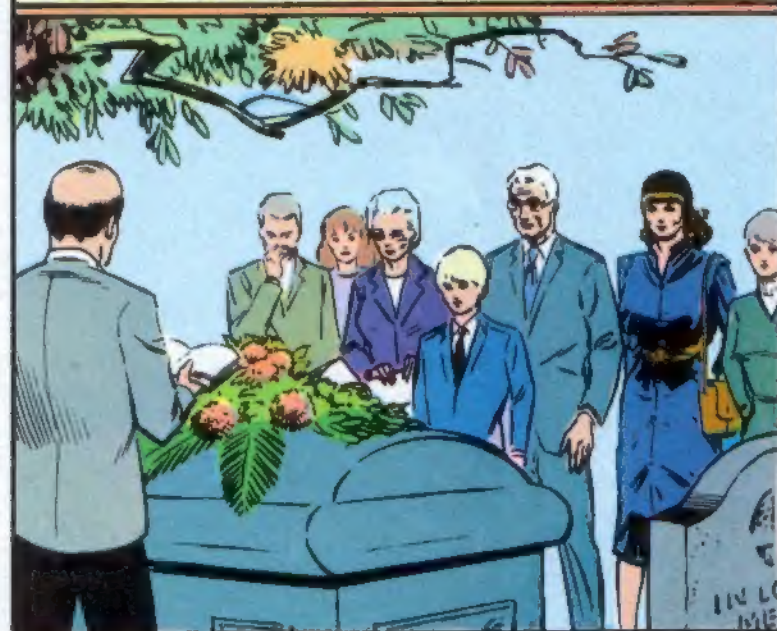


WHEN I FIRST MET ANNE, SHE MENTIONED THAT SHE HADN'T SEEN MIKE SINCE THEIR DIVORCE — BUT HAD CONTACTED HIM FOR "HELP"... I THOUGHT SHE MEANT **FINANCIAL** HELP...

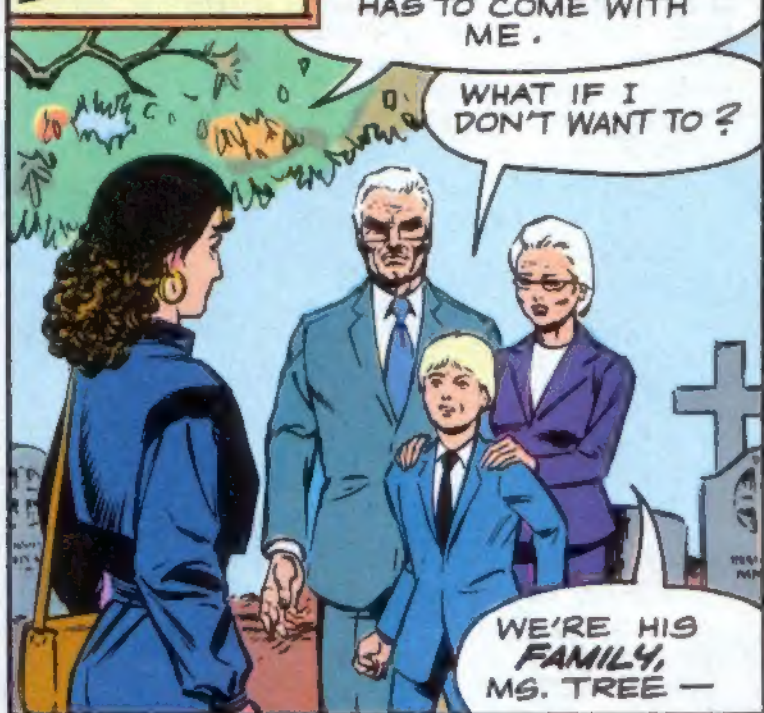




THERE WAS A SMALL GRAVESIDE CEREMONY — I ALLOWED MIKE JR. TO STAY AT HIS GRANDPARENTS' SIDE THROUGHOUT...



BUT AFTER —

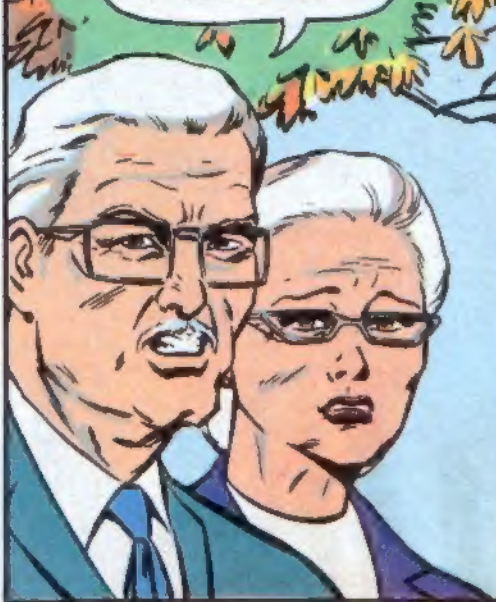


I DON'T KNOW WHY YOUR MOTHER WANTED ME TO BE YOUR... GUARDIAN. BUT I INTEND TO RESPECT HER WISHES. HOW ABOUT YOU?

I... I GUESS SO.



I'LL FIGHT YOU, MS. TREE — WE'LL START IN THE COURTS AND DRAG YOU TO HELL AND BACK, IF NEED BE!



GO WAIT IN THE CAR, A MOMENT, MIKE — I HAVE TO TALK TO YOUR GRANDPARENTS PRIVATELY FOR A MOMENT...



I'M USED TO BATTLES — I LIKE 'EM. BUT LET'S KEEP THIS BETWEEN US AND OUR LAWYERS AND **NOT** PULL GRANDSTAND PLAYS IN FRONT OF THE BOY; YOU'RE TEARING HIM APART, AND I **WON'T** HAVE THAT. GOT IT?



HE'S MY GRANDSON, AND I MEAN TO HAVE HIM — AND NO BLOODTHIRSTY BITCH IS GOING TO STAND IN MY WAY!

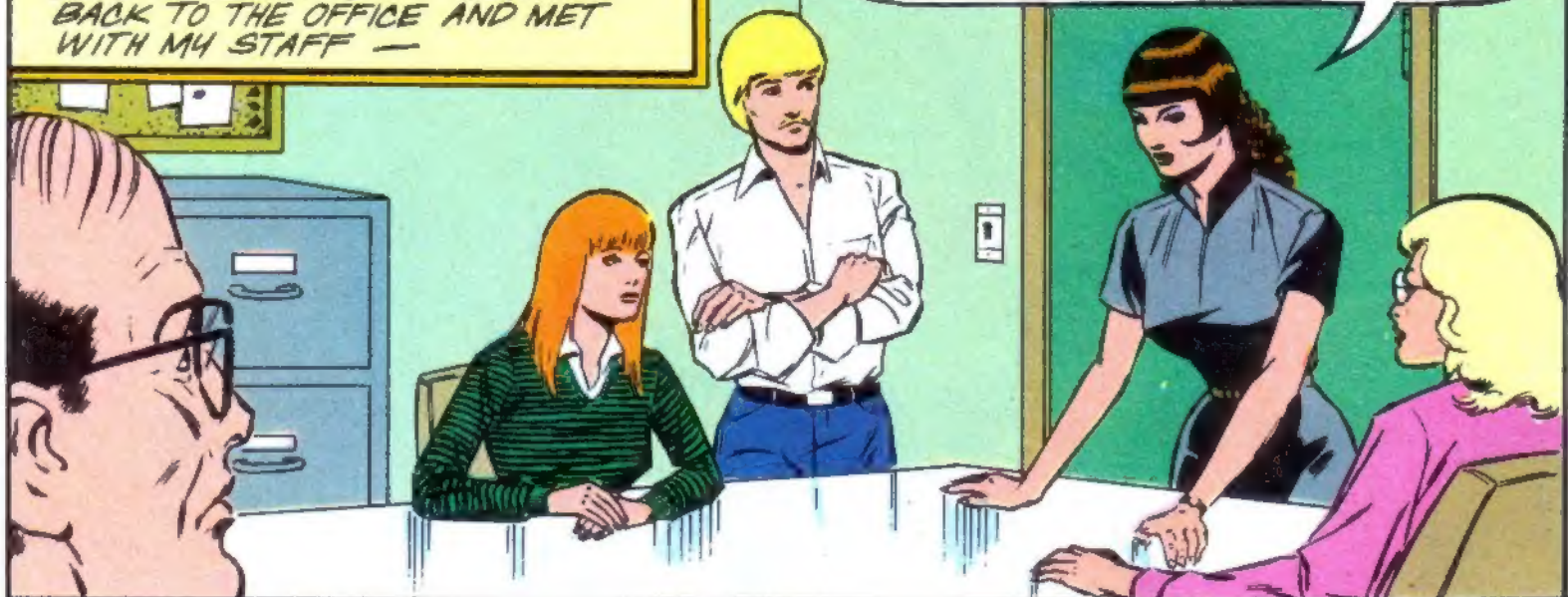


WHEN I FIRST MET ANNE TREE, SHE TOLD ME HER PARENTS WERE "DEAD." LATER SHE INDICATED YOU WERE ALIVE, BUT WERE THE SAME **AS** DEAD TO HER. WELL, I'M LEARNING TO RESPECT HER OPINION OF YOU, MR. BOOKER... CIAO.

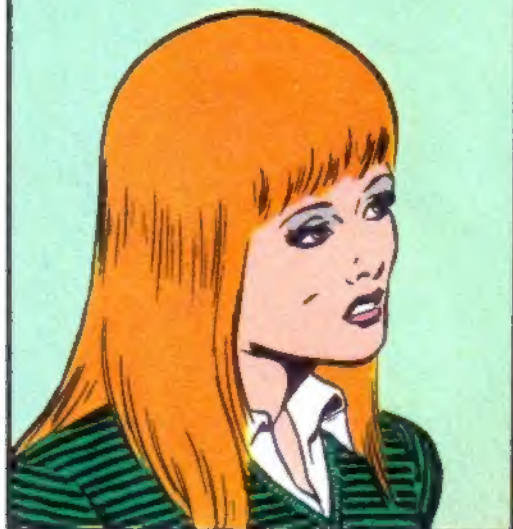


MIKE JR. WANTED TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL, FOR THE AFTERNOON — HE SEEMED TO NEED FOR THINGS TO GET BACK TO NORMAL, SO I CONSENTED. I WENT BACK TO THE OFFICE AND MET WITH MY STAFF —

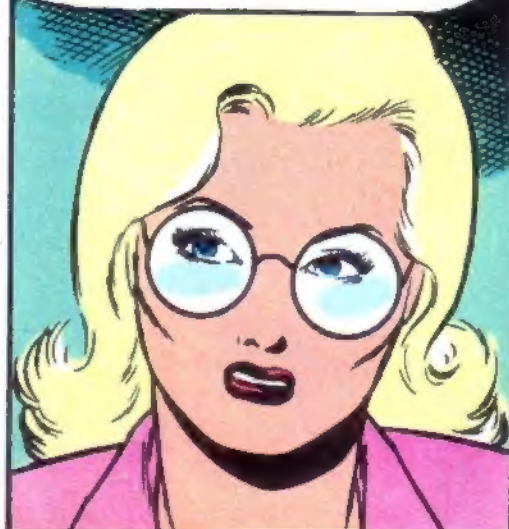
IT'S GOING TO GET VERY HARRIED — AND HAIRY — OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, FOR ALL OF US — SO LET ME LAY IT OUT FOR YOU, NOW...



DIANE, YOU'LL "MAN" THE PHONES AS USUAL, BUT ALSO COVER EFFIE'S DUTIES, AS BEST YOU CAN.



BECAUSE, EFFIE, YOU... AND YOUR .32... WILL BE MOVING IN WITH ME AND MIKE JR. ONLY WE WON'T BE STAYING AT MY APARTMENT — I'VE A "SAFE HOUSE" LINED UP.



I ANTICIPATE MUERTA RETALIATION, SO I'LL BE AVOIDING MY OWN APARTMENT, AND, TO A DEGREE, THIS OFFICE — WHICH IS WHERE YOU COME IN, ROGER.



YOU'LL BE HANDLING THE CASELOAD HERE, FARMING OUT WHAT YOU HAVE TO OTHER AGENCIES; MEANWHILE, DAN AND I WILL BE WORKING THE ANNE TREE MURDER.



THEN EVERYONE FILED OUT — EXCEPT ROGER, WHO LINGERED...

MS. TREE, THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD KNOW — WHEN MIKE AND I WERE CONDUCTING THAT *SUB ROSA* INVESTIGATION OF THE MOB AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT, WELL... ANNE TREE'S NAME CAME UP.



"MIKE SAID THAT ANNE *KNEW* THINGS ABOUT THE MUERTAS; BUT THAT IF THE INVESTIGATION WAS SUCCESSFUL, SHE'D BE SPARED TESTIFYING..."



THAT'S ALL I KNOW, MS. TREE...

IT'S ENOUGH. THANKS, ROGER.



MS. TREE, THERE'S A GENTLEMAN HERE TO SEE YOU — I SHOWED HIM INTO YOUR OFFICE...



MS. TREE? I UNDERSTAND YOU HAVE NEED FOR A LIVE-IN TUTOR — WITH PARTICULAR EXTRACURRICULAR TALENTS.



I CERTAINLY HAVE. YOUR SERVICES ARE USUALLY LIMITED TO GOVERNMENT CASES, I BELIEVE?

GENERALLY. IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, THE WEALTHY OCCASIONALLY MAKE USE OF OUR AGENCY, TO SERVICE THEIR CHILDREN.

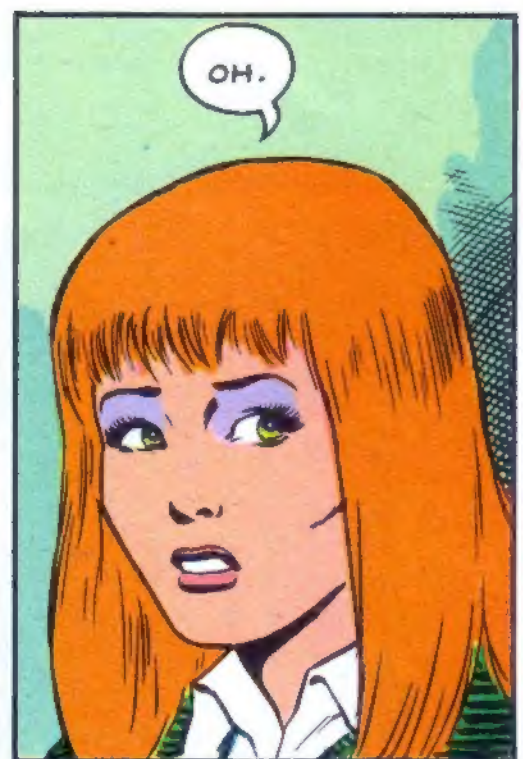
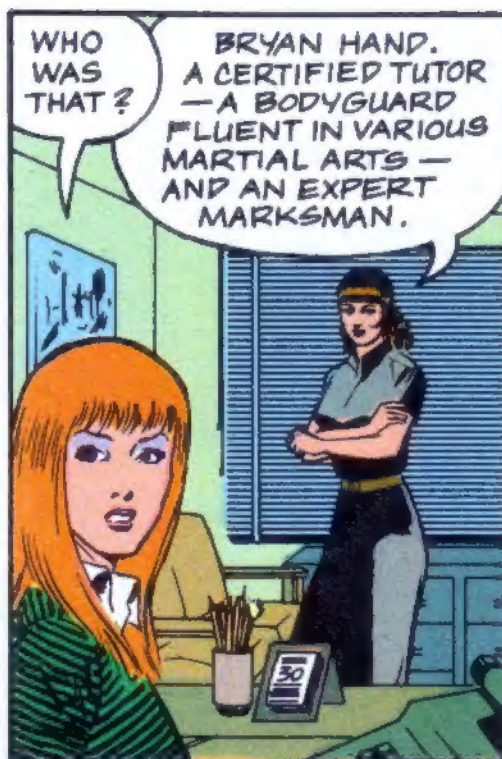


I'M NOT TERRIBLY WEALTHY, BUT I HAVE A BOY WHO COULD BE IN DANGER, BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF MY CURRENT CASE.



HIS GOING TO-AND-FROM SCHOOL WOULD MAKE HIM VULNERABLE — AND, SHOULD OUR "SAFE HOUSE" BE STORMED, WELL... YOU UNDERSTAND.





YOU HAVE TO PROMISE ME YOU WON'T TELL ANYONE WHERE WE'RE STAYING... YOU CAN CALL YOUR FRIENDS, TEACHERS, GRANDPARENTS, **ANYONE**, TO TALK — AS LONG AS YOU DON'T REVEAL WHERE YOU'RE STAYING.



WHAT *IS* THIS PLACE?

THIS IS WHERE YOUR FATHER USED TO LIVE — HIS BACHELOR APARTMENT. I'VE BEEN KEEPING THE RENT UP, IN CASE THIS NEED EVER AROSE.



HE WANDERED ABOUT THE PLACE, TOUCHING THINGS, FINALLY HE SAID —

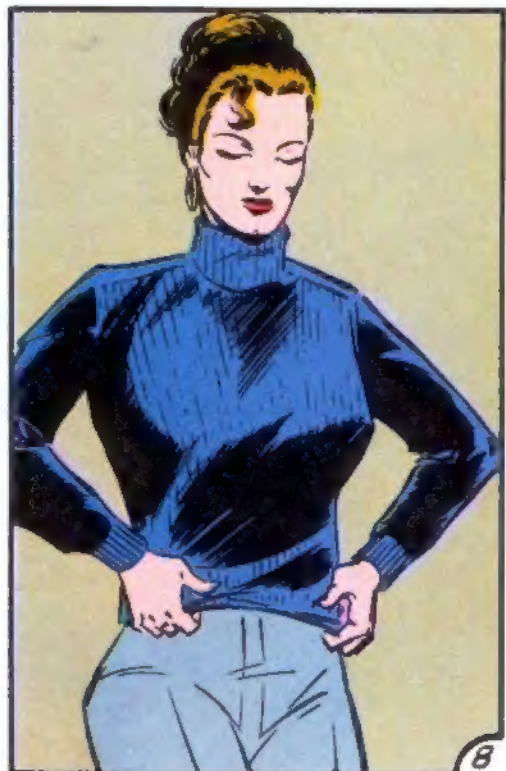
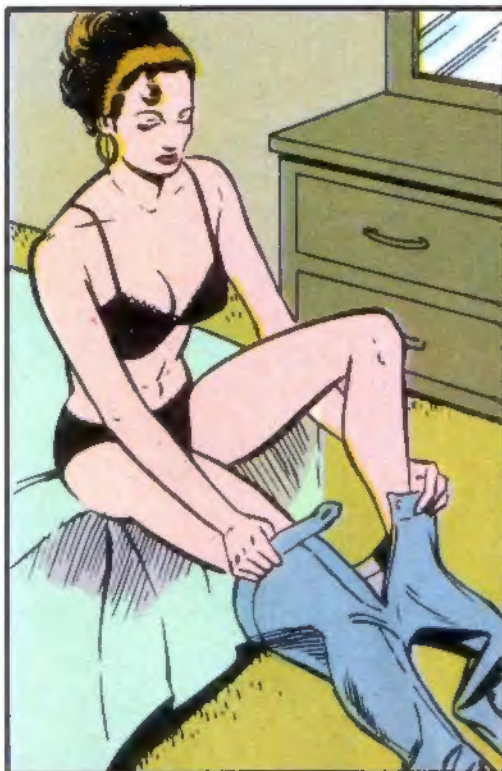
I THINK MAYBE I COULD LIKE IT HERE.

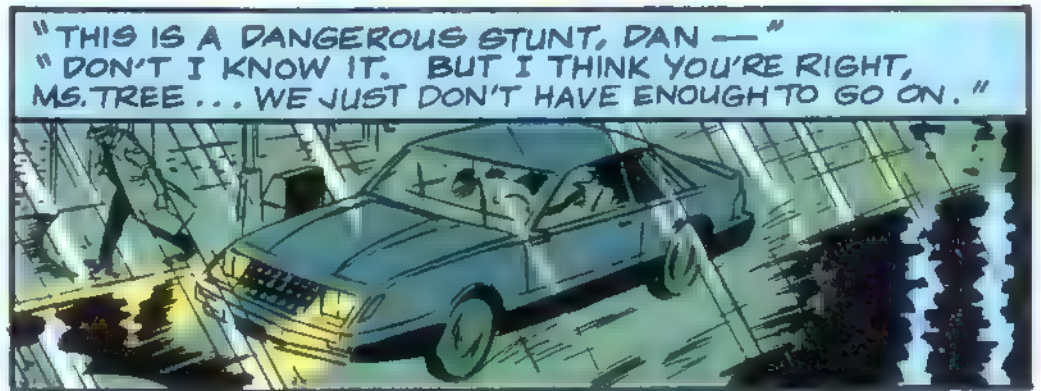
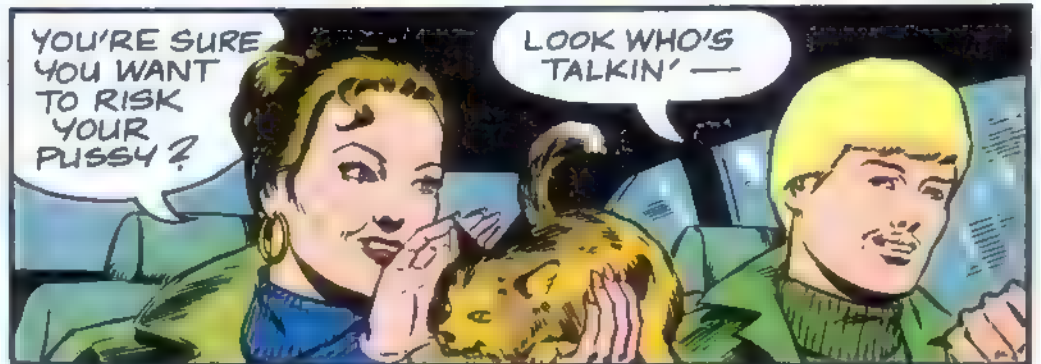
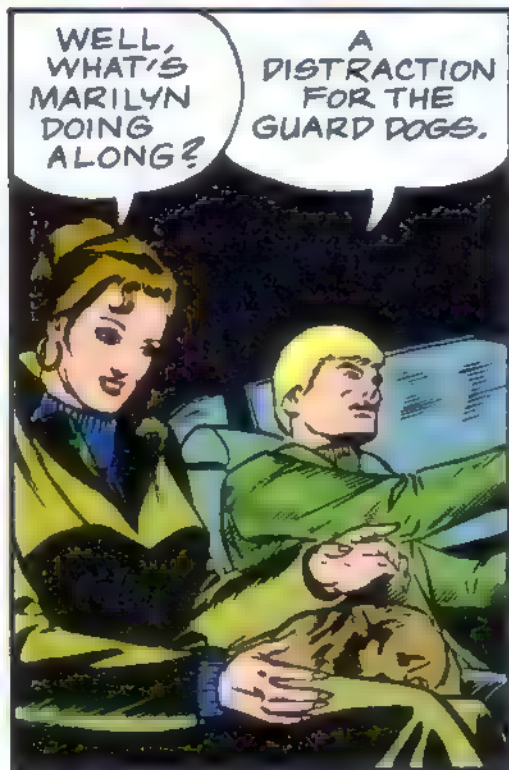


I'M GLAD. NOW, EFFIE WILL BE MOVING IN WITH US, TOO — HELP US LOOK AFTER THINGS. SHE'LL BE HERE SOON.



MEANTIME, I HAVE TO CHANGE — I'M GOING OUT TONIGHT —





Notes from SURF CITY

by Jan & Dean Mullaney

There are Comics, Comics Everywhere!

I'm sure you've noticed, as you peruse the racks at your favorite local comic book emporium, that there are an incredible number of comics being published today; more comics, in fact, and of a wider variety than have been seen in many years.

I'm sure you've also noticed that the sizes, shapes, formats and prices are almost as varied as the contents of those same comics!

What do you think of this "new look" to the comics field? Do you read *every* comic that comes out, or are you selective about what you purchase? If you *are* selective, what criteria do you use in making your picks? Do you buy according to genre, publisher, writer, artist . . . ? Does the quality Baxter paper appeal to you more than standard newsprint? Do you like "painted" colors, or the standard comic book coloring? Do you buy more or fewer comics than you did last year?

Some of these questions may seem rudimentary, but we want to know *exactly* what you think of this comics scene. Address all your comments to:

"What I Think of Comics Today"
ECLIPSE COMICS
P. O. Box 199
Guerneville, CA 95446

We'll run an assortment of your letters once we get a representative sampling of your opinions.

She's Still a Ms. Tree to Me

If you're an old Lovin' Spoonful fan, or if you're aware of the pun inherent in Ms. Tree's name, that heading will make sense. If you're not, read it a second time and it should fall into place. If you still don't get it, write me a letter and I'll tell you.



MS. TREE: great reviews . . . and a new hairdo!

Our favorite female private eye has been picking up some mighty nice reviews lately, from Don Thompson's great words in *The Comics Buyer's Guide* saying that Ms. Tree gives you more story for your money than most other comics, to notices in fanzines as far away as England.

If you haven't sampled what the critics are clamoring about, you don't know what you're missing. Max Allan Collins and Terry Beatty bring you the best — bar none — continuing private eye in comics, and prove once and for all that you don't need a costume to wipe out crime!

Look for Ms. Tree, now elevated to monthly status!

Do You Believe in Magic?

While you're dusting off your old Lovin' Spoonful tunes, we ask the above question. Magic, you see, is an essential part of the current *Sabre* epic by Don McGregor and Billy Graham. It's about the magic, and the joy, of childbirth. Nine months after the touching scene in *Sabre* no. 1, our hero has valiantly fought his way clear 'cross the country to be at Melissa's side. Never mind that The Lounge Lizard, Joyful Slaughter and an entire government battalion are laying in wait! Will *Sabre* survive? Will Melissa endure? What happens to the baby? Will Deuces and Summer make it to the end? Will Blackstar Blood find the missing Willoughby? Will Willoughby ever find a little magic of his own? There's only one way to find out, folks, and that's by picking up the latest issue of *Sabre* wherein most (although not all) of the above questions are answered.

We're Still Looking for People Who Like to Draw

I don't know if it's due to the rapid growth of the comics industry, or because the unemployment situation is so bad, but the submissions have been pouring in at a remarkable rate. It seems as though one out of every ten people wants to break into comics. If you're one of them, here are a few pointers and suggestions.

While either Dean or cat personally read each submission, you won't get a reply unless you enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. After all, you can't expect us to pay for replying to your employment inquiries! That's rule no. 1: always enclose an SASE.

Rule no. 2 is not to kid yourself. Don't submit anything unless you honestly think you're ready to become a professional cartoonist or writer and can measure up to industry standards. Compare yourself with the people currently working with Eclipse. Can you write as well as Steve Gerber? Can you pencil as well as Will Meugniot? Can you ink as well as Alfredo Alcalá? If so, *please*, send us something right now! If you can't, then you're better off getting more experience before you try to become a working professional.

Rule no. 3 is to always send photocopies, not original art.

Rule no. 4 is for writers: don't get your hopes up. Unless you have an artist in tow, the chances that we can use you are slim. Because our comics are creator-owned, we don't need fill-in writers. We're looking for concepts that have both writer and artist.

That about does it for this month. Next column, we promise to introduce you to everyone in the office! Until then, surf's up!

THE SCYTHE

Rendezvous with Ruby Lith

"THE FOG WAS JUST COMING INTO THE BAY AND I FOUND MYSELF RUNNING ALONG A PIER CHASING A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN CARRYING WHAT MUST BE A MILLION DOLLARS IN STOLEN COCAINE, AND ALL I KNEW WAS THAT HER NAME WAS..."

RUBY!

※ PANT※PANT※
HI, RONNIE. LISTEN,
I CAN'T TALK
RIGHT NOW...

SO, CUPID...
THIS IS YOUR
SISTER.

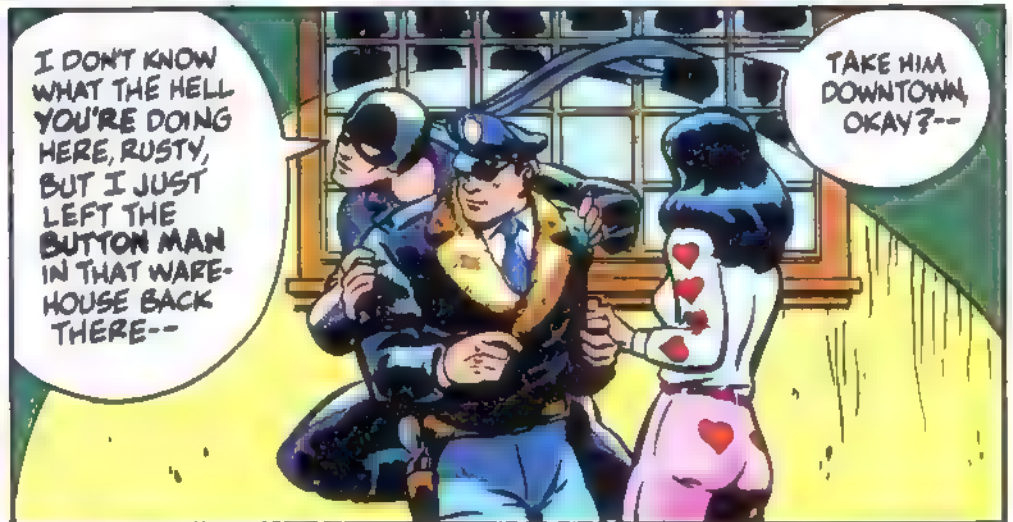
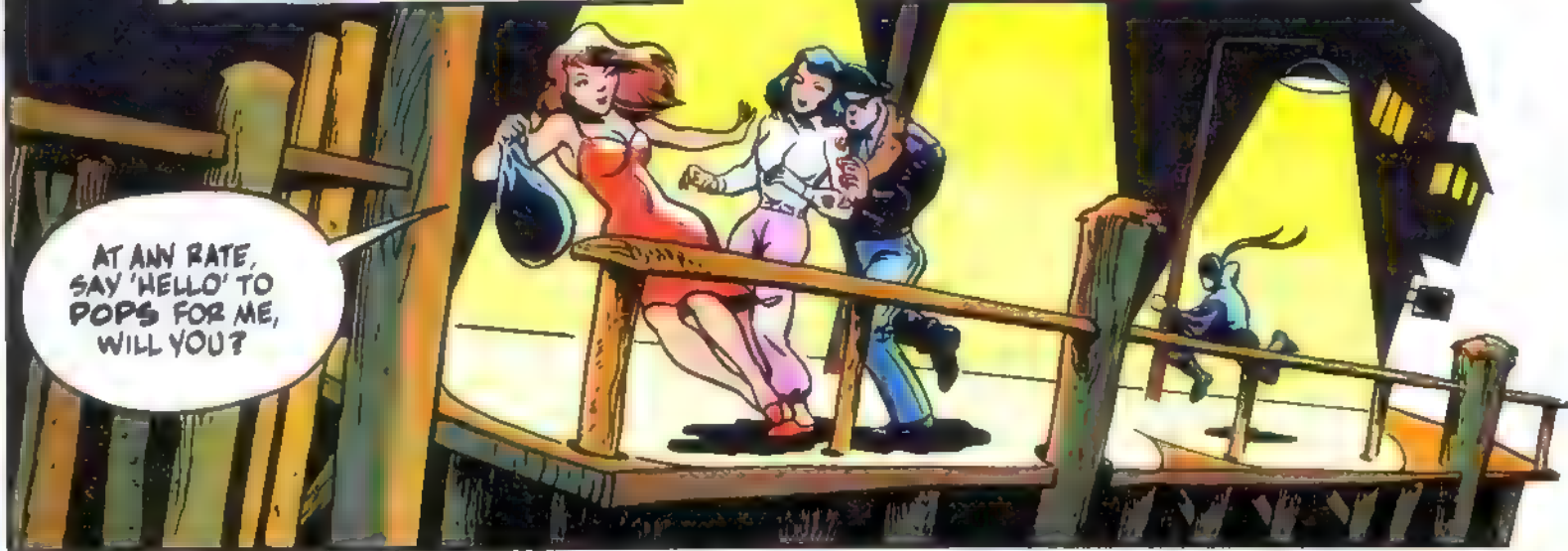
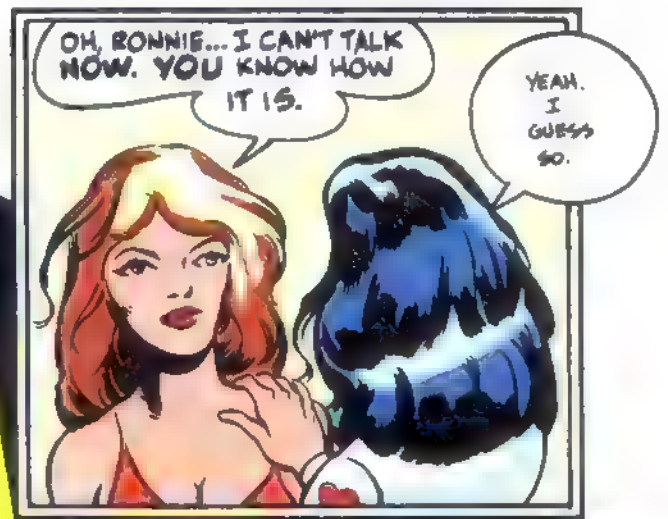
WRITER:
DEAN MULLANEY

PENCILLER:
ELLIS GOODSON

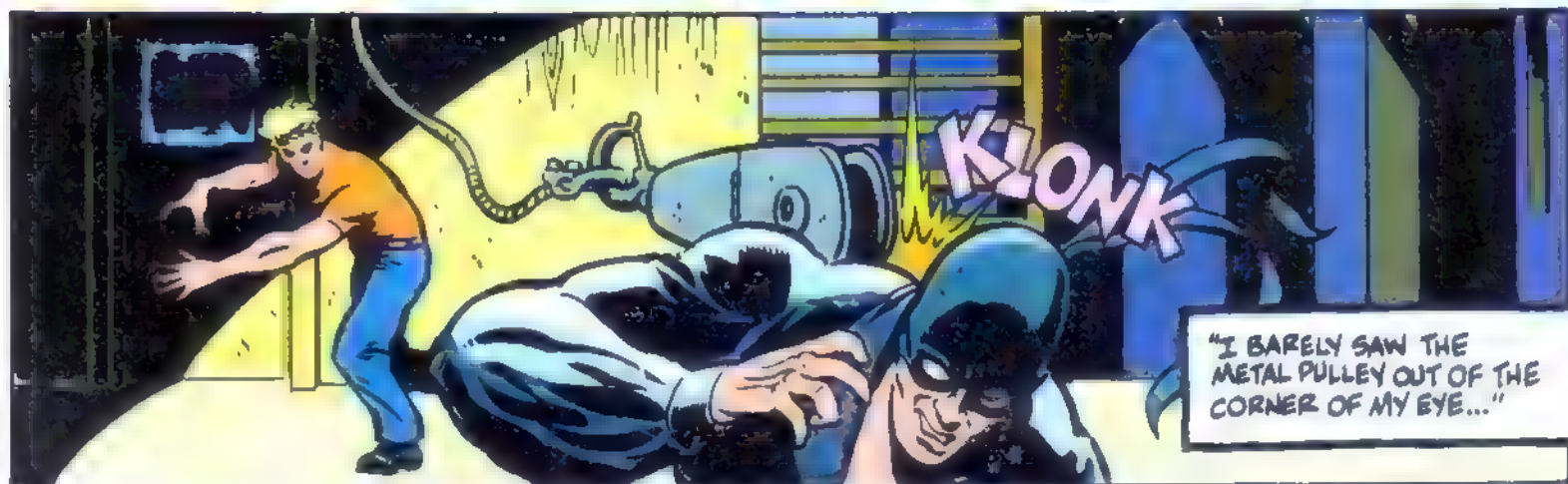
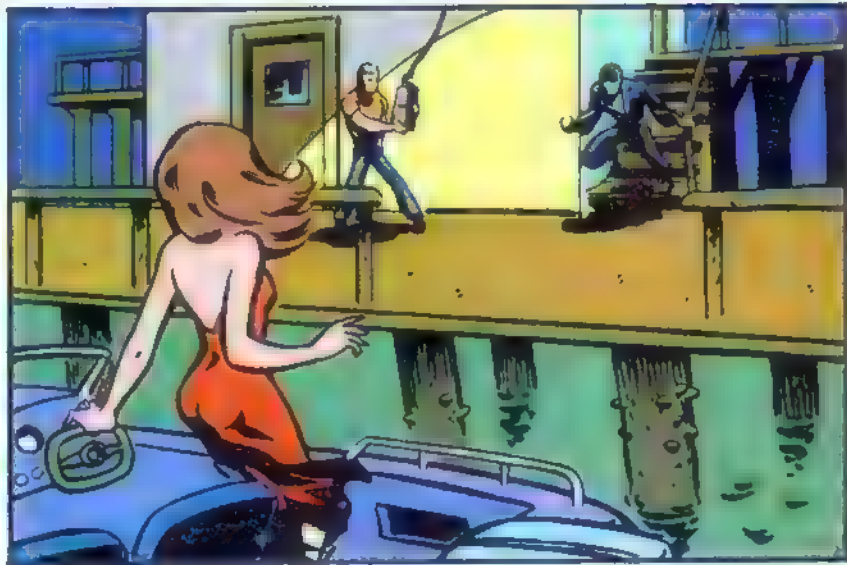
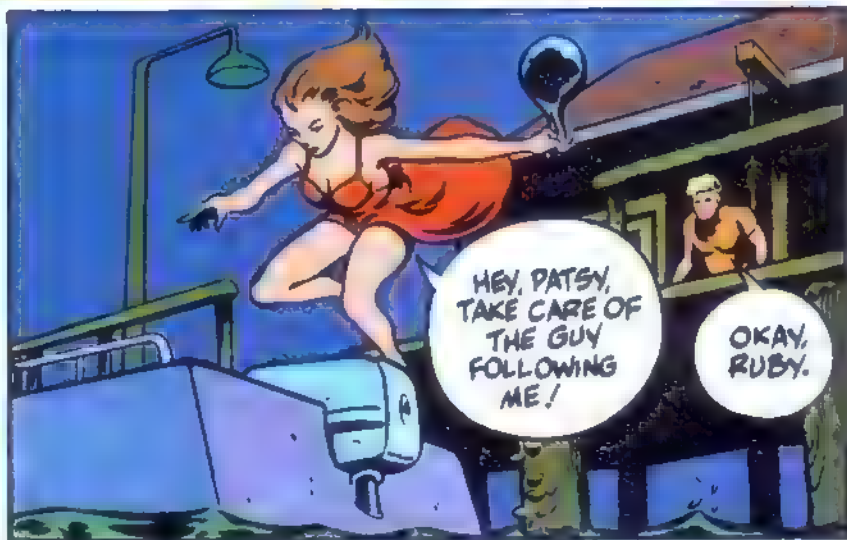
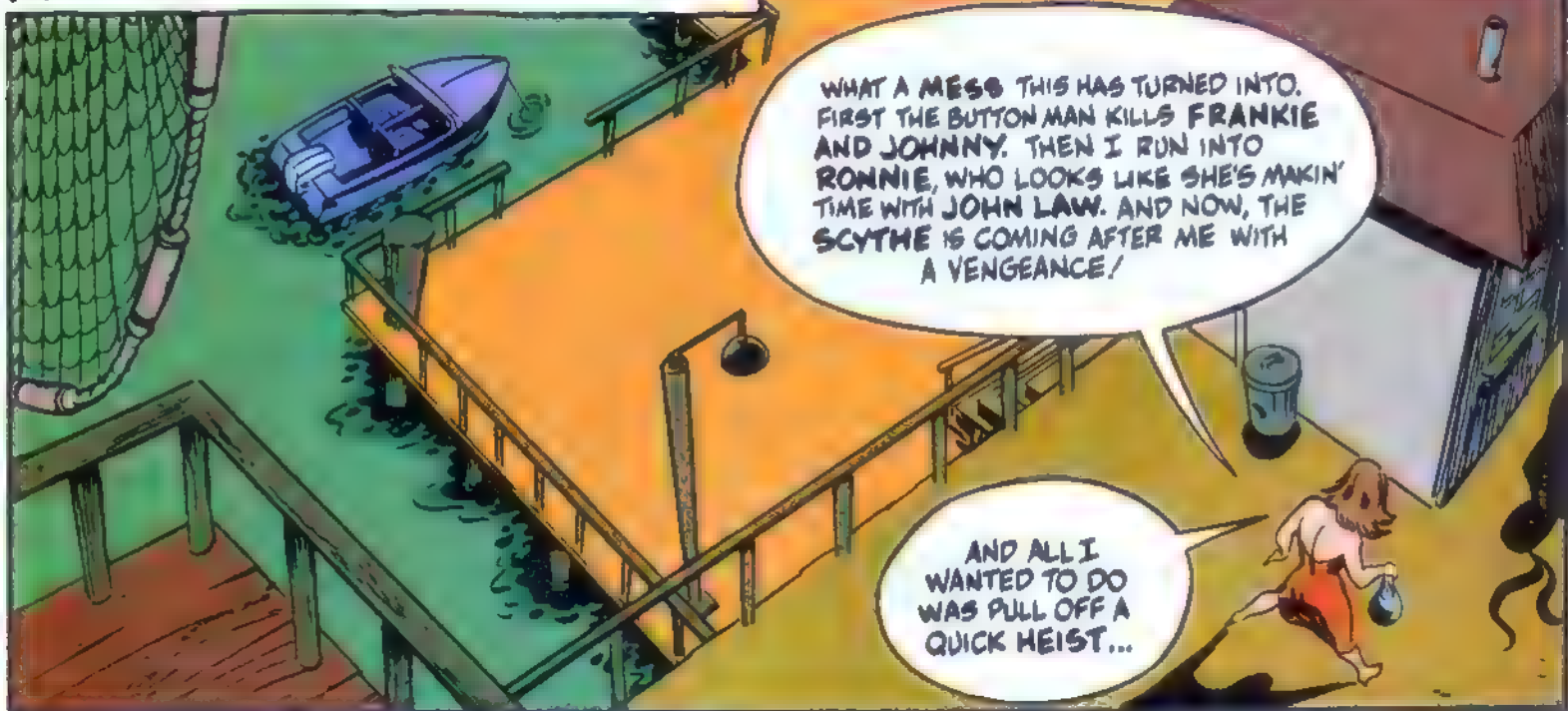
INKER/LETTERER:
WAYNE TRUMAN

COLORIST:
DENIS MCFARLING

EDITOR:
CAT @ YRONWODE



MEANWHILE, WHERE THE PRIVATE BOATS ARE MOORED...



"AND I HOPED THAT IF I
BLACKED OUT, RUSTY WOULD
PICK UP THE PIECES..."

WELL, IF IT AIN'T MY
FRIEND, THE BUTTON MAN!
I WISH YOU STILL HAD A
LITTLE SPUNK LEFT
IN YOU.

C'MON, CLOWN. GET
UP! I DON'T HAVE
MUCH PATIENCE.

UGGH!!

CALL ME
A CLOWN,
HUH?

SHUT UP!

LISTEN, JERK! I KNOW YOU
KILLED JOHNNY GARDENIA, AND
YOU'RE GOING TO PAY FOR
IT IF I
HAVE TO
MAKE IT MY
CAREER
TO SEE
THAT
YOU DO!

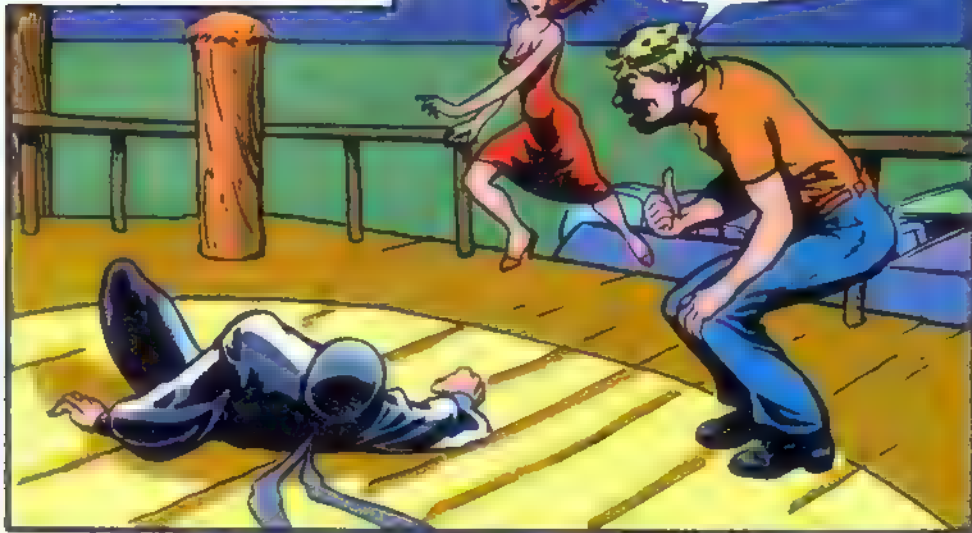
WHO ARE YOU KIDDIN'/?/ YOU DONT HAVE A
CAREER! YOUR SUPERIORS ARE GONNA LOVE
THIS ONE: HARD-NOSED DETECTIVE RUSTY
BRACES MAKING TIME WITH MY BOSS'S YOUNG-

ER DAUGHTER!
WHAT A
LAUGH!

DIDN'T I
TELL YOU TO
SHUT UP?!

DIDNT
I!?!

"THE PULLEY MUST HAVE JUST GRAZED ME. I WAS ONLY UNCONSCIOUS FOR A SECOND BECAUSE RUBY AND HER FLUNKIES WERE STILL THERE WHEN I CAME TO."

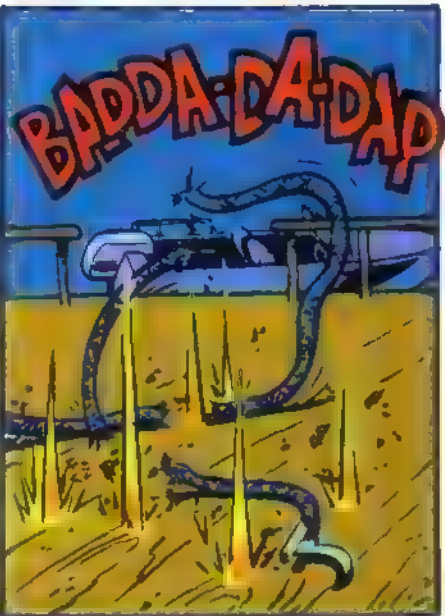


NOT SO HOT AT THIS GAME, ARE YOU? THAT'S TWO DAYS IN A ROW I GET YOU!

MAYBE NOT SO GOOD, BUT HE SURE IS CUTE!



THEN WHY ARE YOU ALWAYS TELLING THESE GUYS TO BEAT ME ON THE MAP PH



HEY, RUBY-- WE'RE NOT HERE TO WATCH A MAKE-OUT SESSION!

HEH HEH



OKAY, ALREADY! TIE HIM UP.

SEE? THERE YOU GO AGAIN, TELLING THEM WHAT TO DO TO ME!

VERY FUNNY!



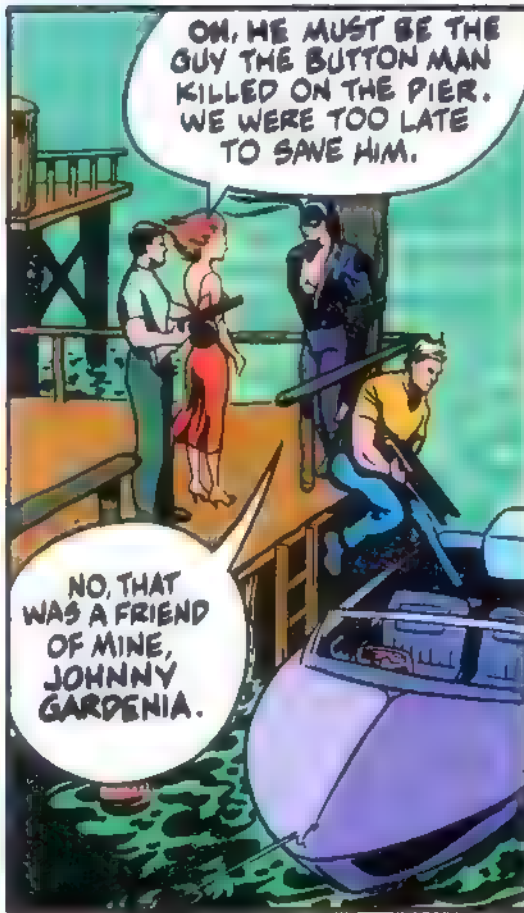
LOOK, RUBY. ALL I'M TRYING TO DO IS FIND A GUY NAMED ALEX SCHUYLER.





I NEVER HEARD OF HIM.

YOU SHOULD HAVE.
HE OWNS THE GREEN
LANTERN BAR NEAR THE
POINT WHERE THE
COCAINE IS DROPPED
OFF.

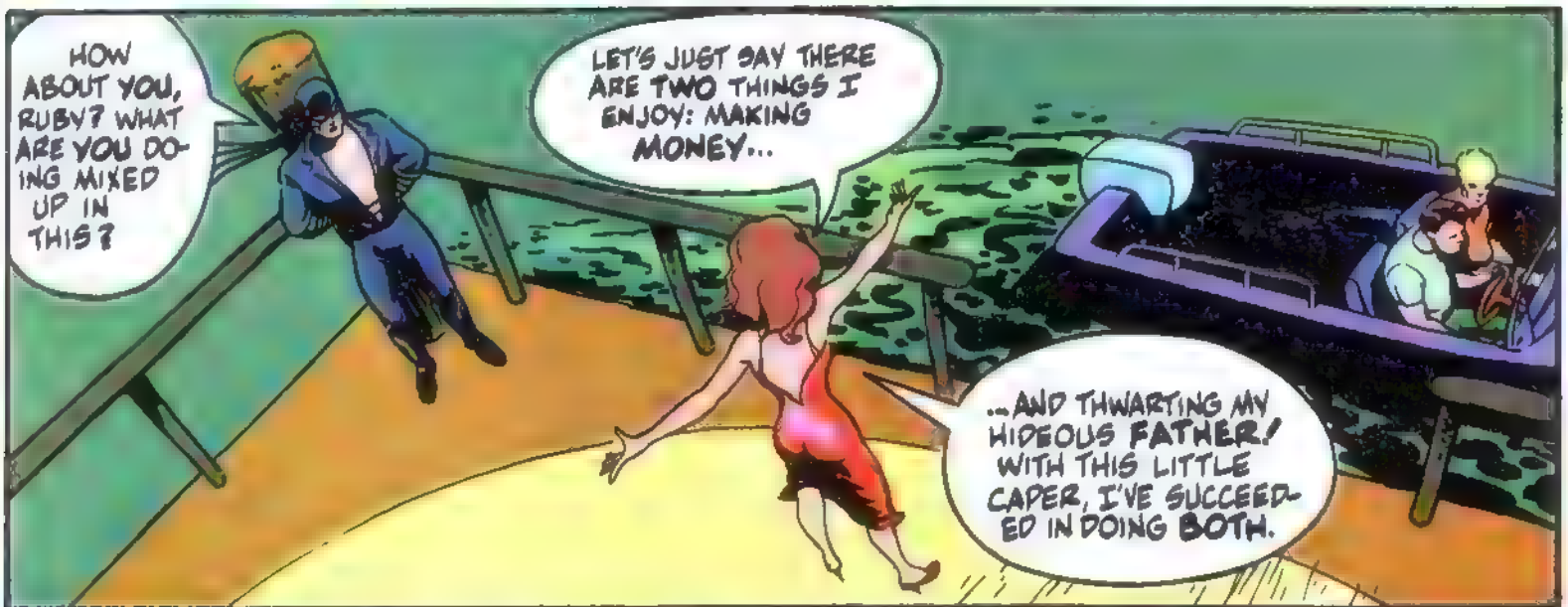


OH, HE MUST BE THE
GUY THE BUTTON MAN
KILLED ON THE PIER.
WE WERE TOO LATE
TO SAVE HIM.

NO, THAT
WAS A FRIEND
OF MINE,
JOHNNY
GARDENIA.



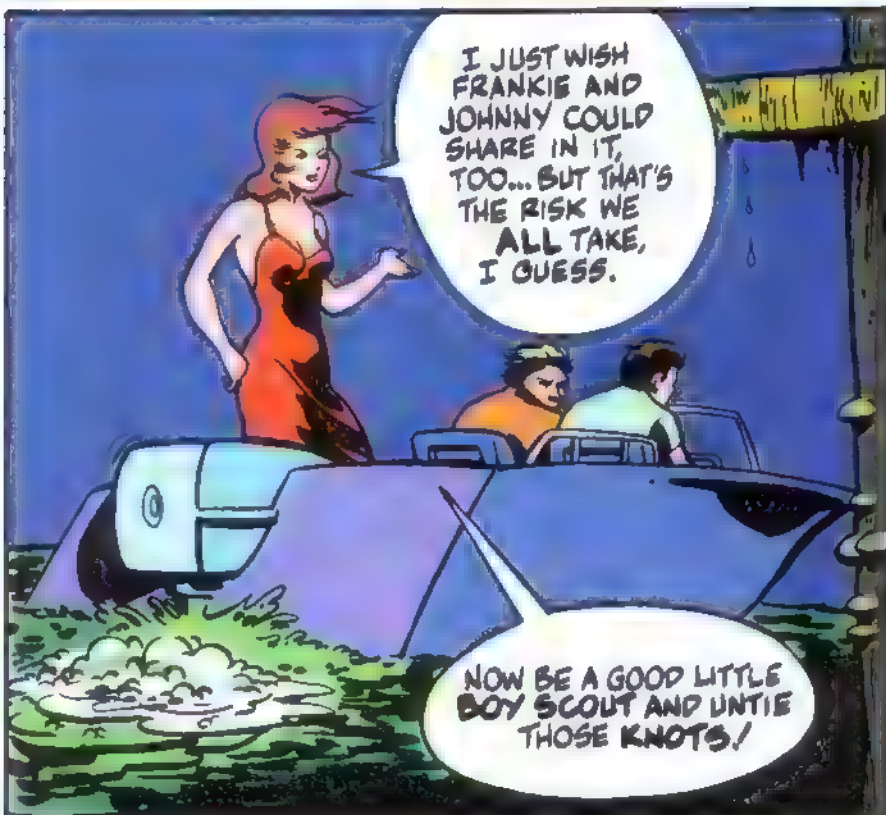
OH. WELL, I'M SORRY
WE COULDN'T SAVE HIM. THE
BUTTON MAN IS A TRUE PER-
VERT. HE ACTUALLY ENJOYS
THINKING OF TWISTED WAYS
TO KILL PEOPLE.



HOW
ABOUT YOU,
RUBY? WHAT
ARE YOU DO-
ING MIXED
UP IN
THIS?

LET'S JUST SAY THERE
ARE TWO THINGS I
ENJOY: MAKING
MONEY...

...AND THWARTING MY
HIDEOUS FATHER!
WITH THIS LITTLE
CAPER, I'VE SUCCEED-
ED IN DOING BOTH.



I JUST WISH
FRANKIE AND
JOHNNY COULD
SHARE IN IT,
TOO... BUT THAT'S
THE RISK WE
ALL TAKE,
I GUESS.

NOW BE A GOOD LITTLE
BOY SCOUT AND UNTIE
THOSE KNOTS!



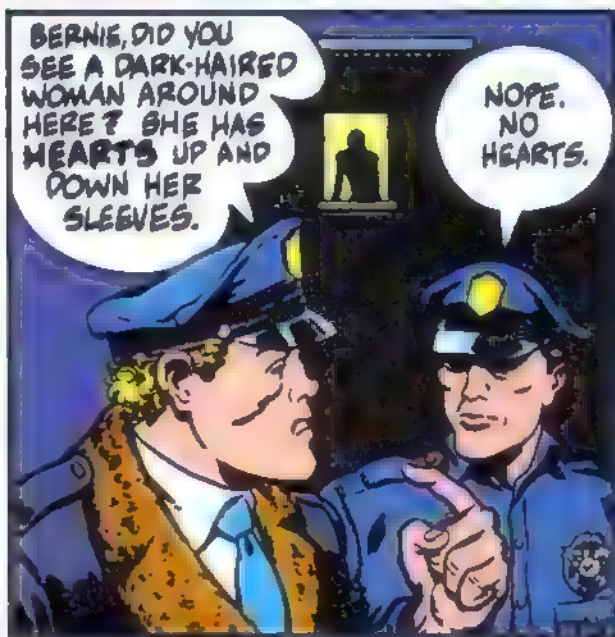
SEE YOU
AROUND,
KIMOSABE!



"WELL, AT LEAST SHE CONFIRMED THAT THE BUTTON MAN KILLED JOHNNY."

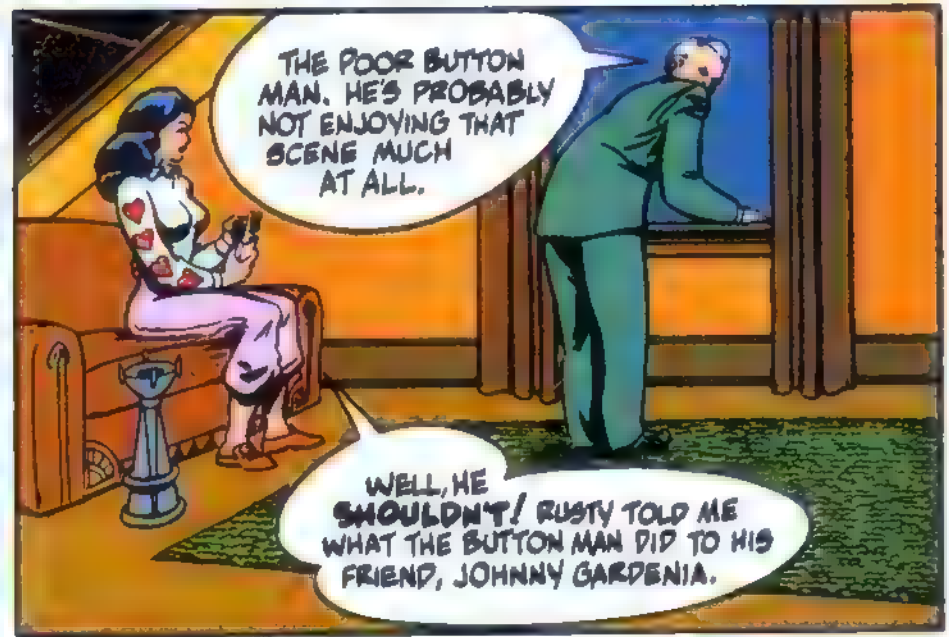
HERE YOU GO, BERNIE. BOOK 'IM FOR MURDER!

HEY, AIN'T THAT THE FACE'S RIGHT HAND MAN WHO RUSTY JUST BROUGHT IN?



BERNIE, DID YOU SEE A DARK-HAIRED WOMAN AROUND HERE? SHE HAS HEARTS UP AND DOWN HER SLEEVES.

NOPE. NO HEARTS.

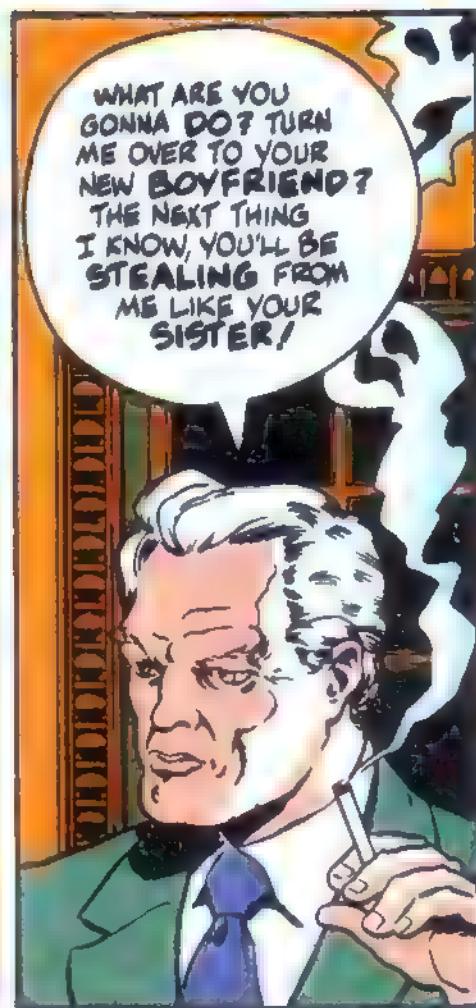


THE POOR BUTTON MAN. HE'S PROBABLY NOT ENJOYING THAT SCENE MUCH AT ALL.

WELL, HE SHOULDN'T! RUSTY TOLD ME WHAT THE BUTTON MAN DID TO HIS FRIEND, JOHNNY GARDENIA.



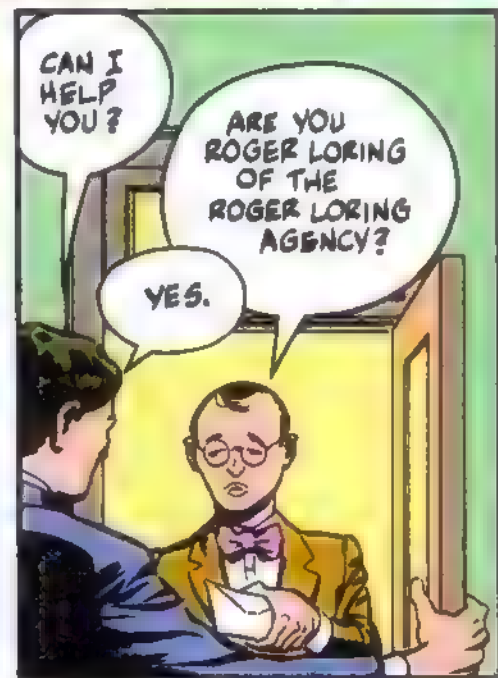
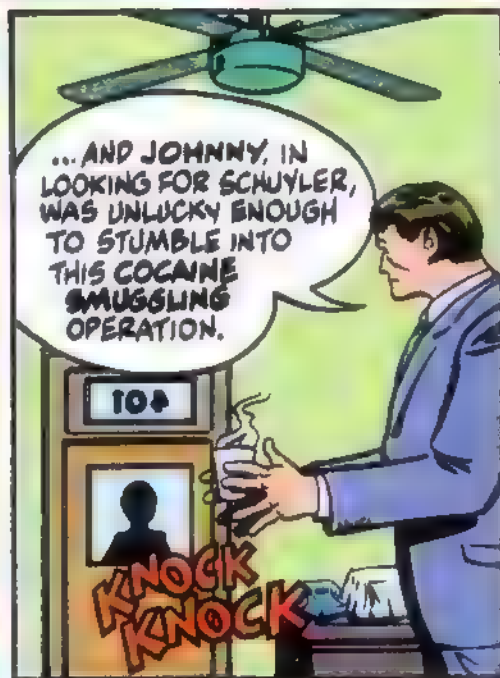
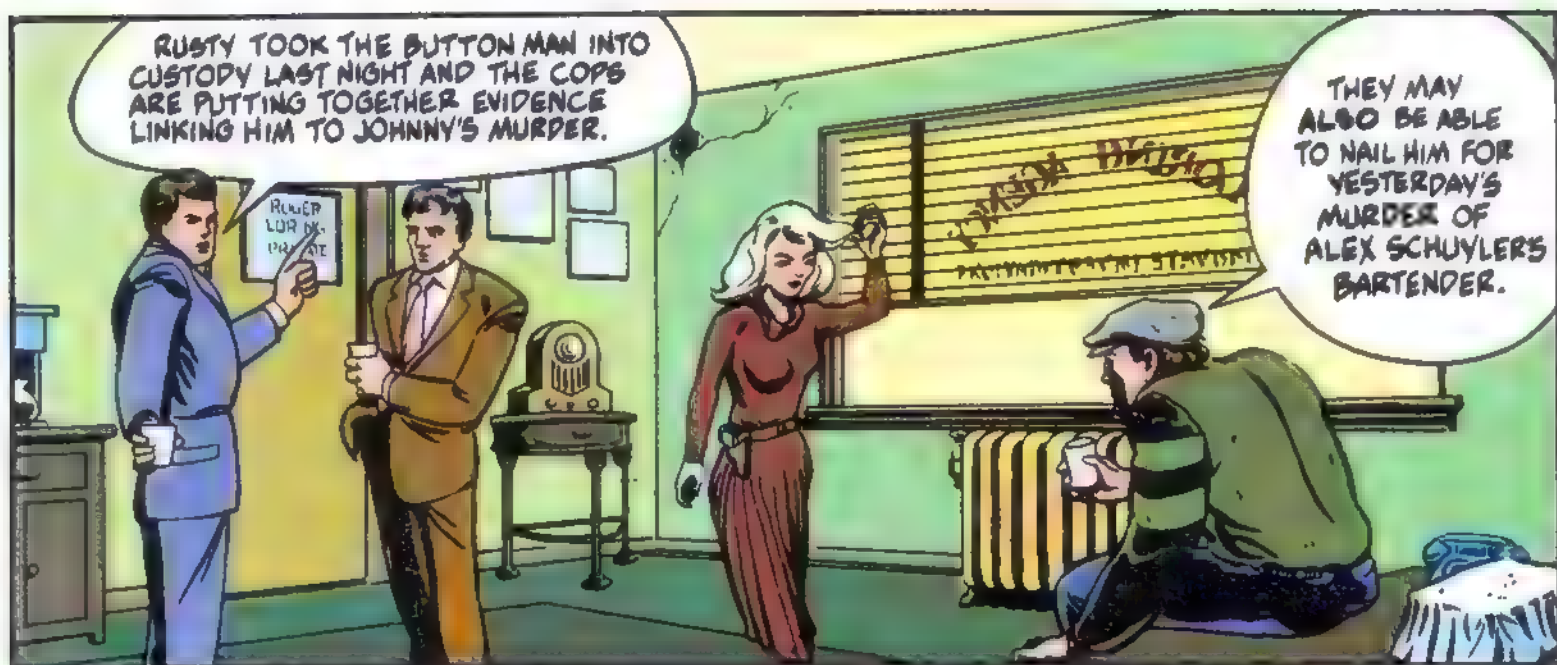
YOU KNOW, DAD, I'VE ALWAYS KEPT MYSELF OUT OF YOUR BUSINESS. I EVEN WENT TO SCHOOL IN EUROPE TO GET AWAY FROM IT. BUT NOW THAT I'VE MET RUSTY I DON'T THINK I CAN IGNORE IT ANYMORE.



WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO? TURN ME OVER TO YOUR NEW BOYFRIEND? THE NEXT THING I KNOW, YOU'LL BE STEALING FROM ME LIKE YOUR SISTER!



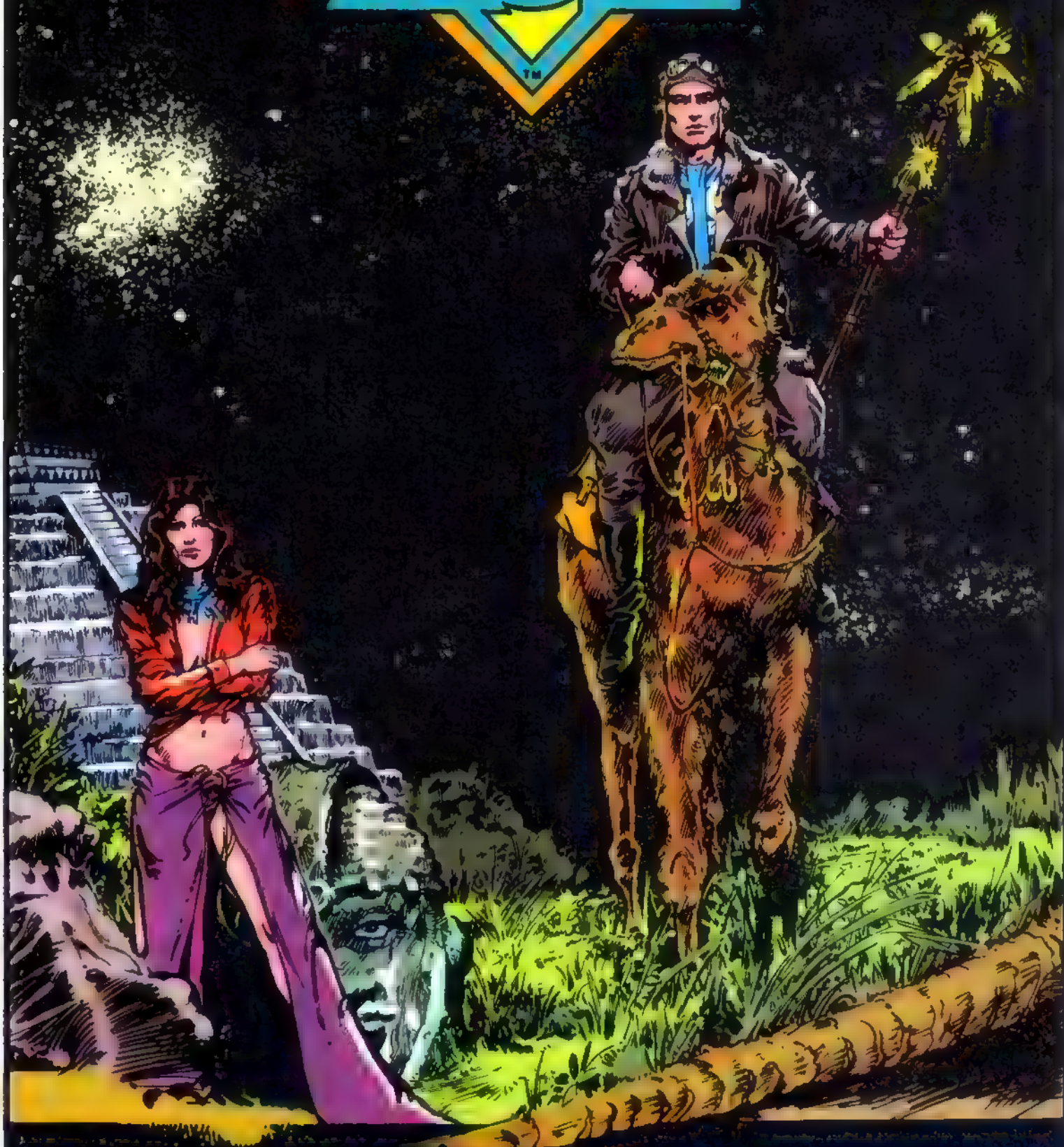
DON'T DISAPPOINT ME, VERONICA. YOU'RE THE ONLY DAUGHTER I HAVE LEFT. I DO WHAT I HAVE TO DO.



TO BE CONTINUED!

Making the past safe from the future

AZTEC XOCIE



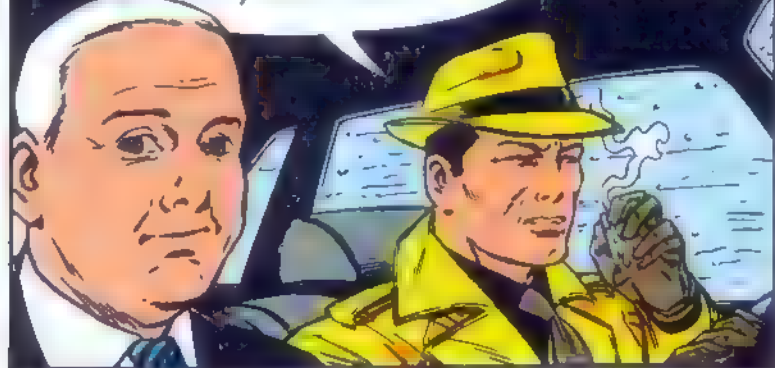
by Doug Moench, Michael Hernandez & Nestor Redondo
Coming soon from Eclipse

"Too damn bad"

A **MIKE MIST** MINUTE MIST-ERY

I'D HAD A PHONE CALL FROM MY REPORTER FRIEND STEVE ARTEX - HE'D BEEN HOLED UP, UPSTATE PUTTING THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON HIS MOB EXPOSE' -

THANKS FOR JOINING ME, LT. DIMM -



MY PLEASURE, MIKE - DID STEVE ELABORATE ON WHY HE WANTED YOU TO COME UP?

NO - WE GOT CUT OFF - PHONE LINES WENT DOWN DUE TO THE STORM -



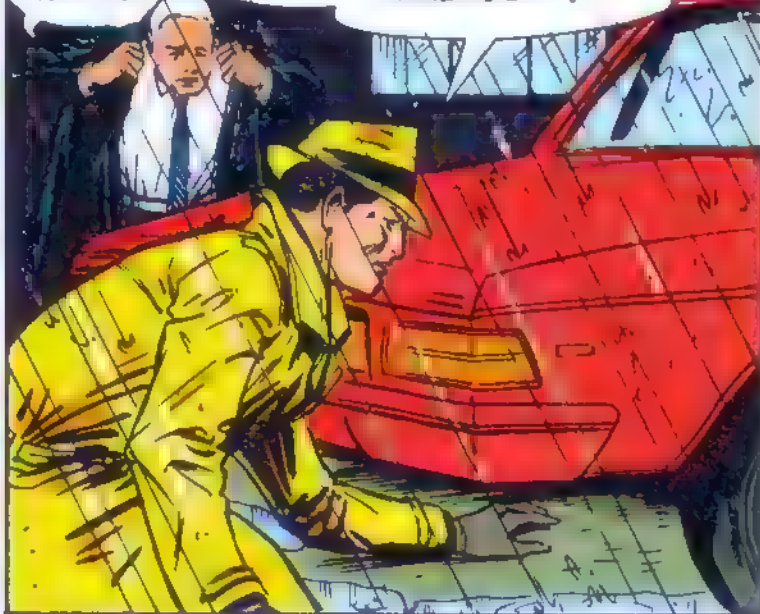
WELL, IF HE NEEDED HELP IMMEDIATELY, HE WAS OUTTA LUCK ... TRIP HERE TOOK THREE TIMES AS LONG AS USUAL.

HERE WE ARE - THAT'S HIS CABIN THERE -



WHOSE CAR IS THAT?

I THINK IT BELONGS TO STEVE'S EX-WIFE, LAURIE. THE SHOWGIRL, REMEMBER?



MIKE! STEVE'S BEEN SHOT - MURDERED!

TAKE IT EASY, LAURIE - DID YOU JUST GET HERE?



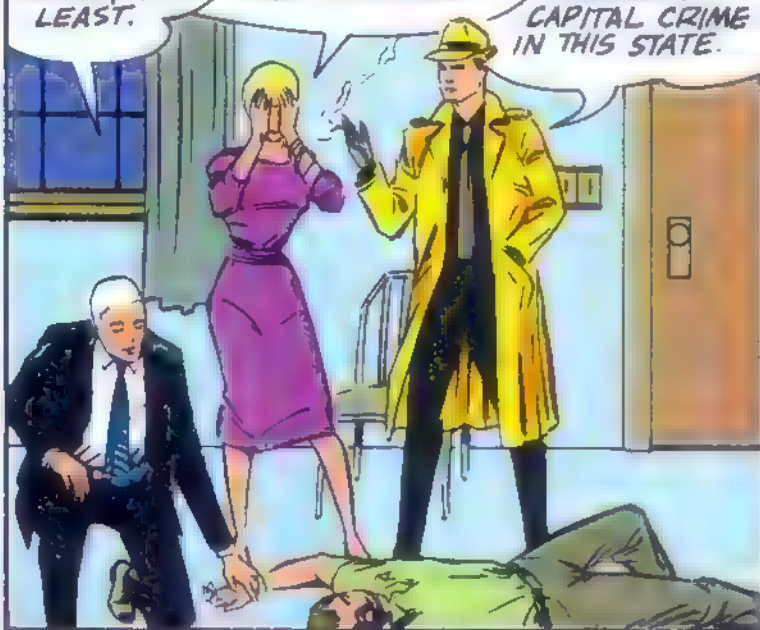
WITHIN THE HOUR - I COULDN'T CALL, THOUGH - PHONE'S DEAD...



SO'S STEVE. FOR SEVERAL HOURS, AT LEAST.

WE WERE (SOB) GOING TO GET BACK TOGETHER -

MAYBE YOU WILL - MURDER'S A CAPITAL CRIME IN THIS STATE.



SOLUTION: LAURIE'S ALIBI WAS ALL WET - HER UNSPOILED HAIR - AND THE DRY CEMENT UNDER THE CAR - MEANT SHE'D BEEN THERE SINCE BEFORE THE STORM (LAURIE KILLED HER EX-HUSBAND FOR THE MOB, LINGERING TO DESTROY HIS EXPOSE PAPERS).



Please send your letters to:
ECLIPSE COMICS
P. O. Box 199
Guerneville, CA 95446

Dear Max and Terry,

I couldn't wait until Dean Mullaney handed me a copy of *Ms. Tree* #3 at San Diego Con. Back at the hotel room, I paged through it, curious as to whether or not I could second guess the ending. You did it again, another surprise and another marvelous story.

I have nothing but admiration for the job you two are doing. The industry needs more books like *Ms. Tree* to expand the horizons and reading habits of the fans. The monthly schedule should make the title more interesting to the casual reader, and the costumed adventures of the Scythe should help corral those too ignorant to get it already.

One thing though, can we please see *Ms. Tree* have a relationship with someone who is not a killer? First Michael Tree, then his killer and now her latest relationship. She deserves a small degree of happiness, don't you think?

Keep up the good work and congratulations on the monthly status. Keep it going!

Bob Greenberger
New York City

As many of our readers know, Bob was the editor of the late, lamented *Comics Scene*. This slick newstand magazine, dealing with comic books and strips and related subjects made a major contribution to the field, in a short period of time, and Bob was largely responsible.

As for your comments, Bob, thanks for saying so many nice things . . . but as for giving *Ms. Tree* a "small degree of happiness"—hey, nobody said it was gonna be easy! Seriously, since conflict is the source of all real stories—and since we have no interest in trotting our heroine (and other major characters) through TV series-like "episodes," which is to say "stories" in which things happen, none of which have any lasting impact on any of the recurring characters—it's unlikely that Michael Tree will soon settle into a well-adjusted, happy life. On the other hand, don't look for *all* her lovers to be murderers—though it may be a while before she's ready to take a romantic chance on *any* man . . .

Dear Max and Terry:

I protest! The ending of the last *Ms. Tree* was an outrage. Sure, it had crossed my mind early on that her new love interest, Patrick, might turn out to be a bad guy—but then I thought, "Naw, they'd never do that so soon after the situation with Chick Steele; it would just be a repetitive rip-off!" But wouldn't you know it, my first hunch was right. And I am not pleased about it! Why must every guy *Ms. Tree* beds down with turn out to be a villain and a deceiver? Is this meant to imply something about *Ms. Tree*'s gullibility and lack of judgment? Are we to infer that such betrayals are the inevitable lot of any sexually active woman? Or does it all merely boil down to lack of imagination on the parts of Collins and Beatty? For pete's sakes, give her a decent lover whom she (and we) can feel secure with.

While my indignation is still at a high pitch, there's another point on which I'd like to take issue with you, and that is your criticism of Modesty Blaise in the letters page. Do you know what a risk you're taking of alienating the legion of devoted Peter O'Donnell fans (myself among them) with those rash words? It's fine that you want to create a different, less omnipotent type of heroine, but the Modesty Blaise type has her place also. The fact that she's a better fighter than 99.9% of the people on earth doesn't mean that she's "butch" or unrealistic. After all, *someone* has to be in the top .1%, and it's perfectly valid to write stores about such a person.

O'Donnell's achievement in creating her is such that you (or anyone) would have to labor a long, long time to come up with anything comparable.

But I don't want to end this letter on a negative note. I still enjoy the dialogue and art on *Ms. Tree* very much, and am willing to take up your cause against the criticisms of Richard Lichter and his ilk. Mr. Lichter, take another look! So Terry Beatty doesn't draw faces in the super-realistic manner of Neal Adams—so what! There are other valid drawing styles, y'know. Beatty's stylized faces are something that can grow on you. My husband disliked the Beatty style at first, but now he's enthusiastic. (Myself, I loved Beatty's art from the very beginning.) Beatty's unique style is most refreshing in this age of mindless Adams rip-offs.

Before I go, one final plea: please keep your original title, *Ms. Tree's Thrilling Detective Adventures*. I really get a charge out of it.

Randi Eldevik
Minneapolis, MN

Randi, we thank you for your long, impassioned letter (and apologize for trimming it down a bit, for space considerations) and appreciate your support and thoughtful comments. The title was simply too unwieldy, particularly from a cover design standpoint; also, in the current market, with its emphasis on superheroes and such, our best bet seems to be emphasizing the central character—*Ms. Tree*—rather than the detective genre itself. Comics fans are very character oriented—*Ms. Tree* continues to get marriage proposals from fans (whereas bachelor Beatty has received none as yet) (Collins is married).

As to Modesty Blaise . . . here, in its entirety, is what I said about Modesty Blaise in *SWAK* #3: "Even the great Modesty Blaise seemed to us a bit butch." (The word "butch," incidentally, was invoked by letter writer Jeremy Megraw, to whom I was responding at the time.) I hardly think we slandered Modesty or her creator by calling her "great"; as for her being "a bit butch," her appearance—short black hair, black apparel (frequently slacks), her icy beauty, her icy demeanor—is in keeping with popular fiction's stereotype of a lesbian, particularly of the period when O'Donnell created Modesty. And I'm sure evoking that image was purposeful—giving her an ambiguous sexuality (which over the years blossomed warmly into a more overtly, obviously female one)—was part of her aura of mystery.

Randi, both Beatty and Collins are a part of the "legion of devoted Peter O'Donnell fans." I've been a part of that legion as long as anybody in the U.S., I'd guess, having bought the first Modesty Blaise novel in hardcover back in the mid-'60s when I was in high school. Having exchanged mutually complimentary letters with Peter O'Donnell for several years now (if I glance up from typing I can see the Jim Holdaway original he sent me), I make my comments about Modesty, modestly, from an informed position.

As far as Patrick's villainy being a rip-off of the first *Ms. Tree* story . . . how can you steal what already belongs to you? I think the power of that ending is obvious, in how worked up it got you. Frankly, we depended on readers discounting Patrick, just as you did ("Naw, they wouldn't do that again, not so soon")—which makes the surprise a valid one. And once the reader has found out Patrick is guilty, we hope their guard will be let down so that the double-whammy of the psychiatrist being the *major* villain will have its proper impact.

I really don't think our use of male villains can be fairly read as some negative or sexist statement about women; if Michael Tree were a man, and the villains had turned out to be women, we'd get called sexist, too. That's the common complaint—sexism (and/or misogyny)—when the woman the male private eye loves turns out to be a killer (Hammett's *Maltese Falcon*, Spillane's *I, the Jury*). But whether the private eye is a man or a woman, or the betraying lover is a man or a woman, matters not; what does matter is the emotional impact of love betrayed. As the heart of the private eye story, often, is a tragic love story. This *isn't* about sex, kids—it's about love.

Dear Max, Terry and Dean—

It speaks eloquently of Ms. Tree's originality when you realize that her first four-color adventure ended with several plot twists, not just one. The tragedy is that Michael's solving of the honeymoon killing (and the subsequent deaths of Patrick and Doctor Kassel) have left her right back where she started: lonely and in dire need of an understanding ear. (Sigh)

I'll miss the long corny title, which is definitely one of the most beautiful designs I've ever seen on a magazine cover. Was it Orzechowski's handiwork, or maybe Terry's?

I really appreciated "Mike Mist" this month; humor like this is great in a "serious" comic like Ms. Tree. It keeps the drama from numbing readers. By the way, doesn't Mike's vivacious blonde have any name besides "Doll"?

I'm kind of disappointed to see the word "butch" bandied about on the letters page. Hopefully, the idea that men and women have separate behavior categories is on its way out. Calling a tough, emotionally restrained woman "butch" is as stupid as calling a man who cries a "fag."

I look forward to seeing Ms. Tree in its new format.

Amy Sacks
Deal Park, NJ

We're delighted that our double-twist ending worked so well on you, Amy. Some of our readers seem distressed that we make life so difficult for Ms. Tree; well, that's what we're here for. Altogether, now: life ain't no damn picnic! At least not in this comic book, it isn't.

The *Thrilling Detective* logo was Denis McFarling's work; so is the new logo, though it is based upon Terry Beatty's original logo for the individual chapters (though in the current story, the title pages feature a logo by Terry based upon the way Denis did Ms. Tree in the old logo—if you aren't confused yet, you aren't paying attention). Denis is now coloring the book as well, Petra Goldberg Scotese having gone on to other projects. As for the best of the lettering, beginning with this issue Gary Kato (who is assisting on the art now, and doing beautiful work we think) handles that role. Terry continues to do the chapter-title lettering himself.

Some of the humor in "Mike Mist" will be lacking in our current one-page format; it takes the space available just to do the mystery. We do hope to return to a two-page format before long. "Doll" is, indeed, Mike's girl friend's actual first name; if anyone out there can figure out why (and there *is* a reason), we will suitably reward them (really). Also, her appearance is a comics reference—a reward to the first person who figures that out (and goes to the trouble of telling us, that is), as well.

As for the word "butch"—well, like I told the last female who asked, don't look at me! It was that guy Megraw what brung it up! While I agree with your point about male/female behavior categories, I don't agree that the word "butch" is the female equivalent of "fag." More like the female equivalent of "effeminate." Sometimes unpleasant words are necessary to get a point across—and the point here is, simply, many heroines of popular fiction (including movies and TV) have tended either toward a mannish appearance/manner/behavior, and/or are super-women who are better than men. We'd like to avoid either cliché.

Dear Max and Terry,

Simply wonderful! I love detective stories—my favorite is Mike Shayne with Travis McGee a close second. Now Michael Tree can be added to my list! Not only is she a living doll, she is one tough chick!

I can identify with Ms. Tree, for you see I am a private detective myself. Your storytelling and art make for an enjoyable story.

One more thing—please! Please! Please! Go monthly! 60 days of waiting is killing me! Continued great success.

Russ Smith
Parma, OH

Never say "Please! Please! Please!" to an old rock 'n' roller like me, Russ, or you're liable to hear me go into my James Brown medley. As you've noticed by now, we are monthly, and if sales (and our energy) remain strong, we'll stay monthly. I've stated on various SWAK pages that we're always especially pleased when women (and girls) write to say we're doing the female point-of-view well; now, a private eye has written us, and we feel we've really made the grade! (Now, if only a female P.I. would write . . .)

Dear Eclipse,

I loved Ms. Tree, but both my daughter and I did not like her hairdo. Too straight in the front and too curly in the back, and I personally don't like the purple undertow type of curl in the front. Otherwise, great fun.

Liselotte Erlanger
Mendocino, CA

Hey, what do you take us for? The *Katy Keene* of crime? Letters about hairdos! Come on, let's have some letters about Ms. Tree's gun . . .

Actually, we'd rather talk about her hairdo. The hairdo was based upon one from a fashion magazine, a real, specific hairdo, chosen for its distinctiveness. Early on (the first few chapters of the original *Eclipse Magazine* serial, "I, for an Eye"), Terry's artwork was rather cartoony—and Ms. Tree's hairdo was meant to work more as a design than anything else, a trademark look—like Dennis the Menace's cowlick, or Li'l Abner's forelock (Abner's hair looks exactly the same from either profile, ever notice?). But lately, as the artwork has gradually become more realistic, Terry has begun to draw that same hairstyle more realistically. Occasionally Ms. Tree *will* wear her hair differently (it's "up" in this issue, part of the time). But she'll return to her trademark hairstyle, and keep wearing it, just like she'll keep wearing her dark raincoat; 'cause she's a comic book character, and she needs her distinctive look.

Dear Max,

I have never been much of a fan of detective books, and I suppose there are many who would call me a dyed in blue, red and yellow, super-hero nut. However, the fascinating and smooth story of your first issues has given me new insight into what a comic book can be.

I was very impressed with the visual effect of the book. I love the look of Ms. Tree from her hairstyle to her figure.

Wesley M. Allison
Blue Diamond, NY

Dear Sirs,

I just met Ms. Michael Tree, care of Ms. Tree's *Thrilling Detective Adventures* #1 . . .

The artwork is clean and direct. In a sense, it is almost European in style. The unique quality of the art is actually what first caught my interest.

P.S. What does "SWAK" mean?

Richard M. Cook
Brantford, ONTARIO

(Shortly after the above letter arrived, Ms. Tree #3 hit the stands, in which I mentioned that S.W.A.K. is the initials of a '60s song by Brian Hyland.)

Dear Sirs,

"Sealed With A Kiss" I Thanks for the clue.

Richard M. Cook

MS. TREE

"THE COLD DISH"

© 1983

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

Chapter Four

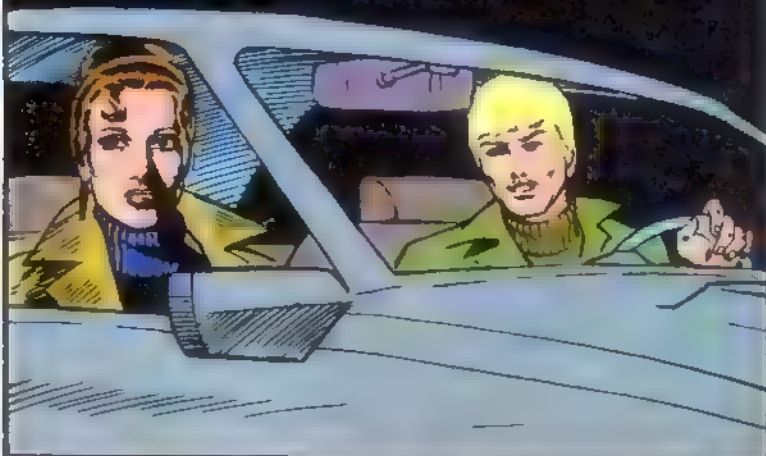
Forgive Her Trespasses

BY MIDNIGHT THE RAIN HAD LET UP... BUT STORM CLOUDS HOVERED OVER THE MUERTA MANSION, JUST THE SAME —



JUST LIKE A GOTHIC NOVEL...

ARE YOU **SURE** YOUR INFORMATION IS SOUND?



MY POLICE CONTACT IS SOUND AS A DOLLAR USED TO BE... WHICH MEANS WE'LL HAVE AN HOUR TO DO WHAT WE CAME TO —



MUERTA LIVED UPSTATE — AN HOUR AND A HALF FROM THE CITY, IN A RURAL AREA, NOT FAR FROM RICH FARMLAND, BUT IN A VALLEY, A POCKET INTO WHICH PLENTY OF TREES AND FOLIAGE WERE TUCKED. MUERTA'S PRIVATE CASTLE WAS PROTECTED BY A SECURITY STAFF OF A DOZEN MEN; THE COUNTY COPS PATROLLED BY ONCE AN HOUR ... AND WE'D SEEN THEM PASS BY AS WE TURNED DOWN THE ROAD —

CAN THAT CAT TAKE CARE OF HERSELF? THOSE TWO DOBERMANS HAVE THE RUN OF THE GROUNDS, YOU KNOW...

THE DOG AIN'T BEEN BORN THAT CAN OUTRUN MARILYN...

AND I WON'T HAVE TROUBLE RETRIEVING HER — THERE'S A TREE NEAR THE FAR WALL OPPOSITE WHERE WE ARE NOW... I'LL POSITION MYSELF OVER THERE, AND MARILYN'LL HEAD MY WAY.

"ARE YOU SURE SHE'LL HEAD FOR THAT TREE?"
"POSITIVE — WHEN THOSE DOGS COME AT HER, SHE'LL GO RIGHT TO IT — IT'S HER ONLY OPTION; BESIDES, SHE'LL SENSE THAT'S WHERE I AM."

SHE MUST HAVE QUITE A SENSE OF SMELL.

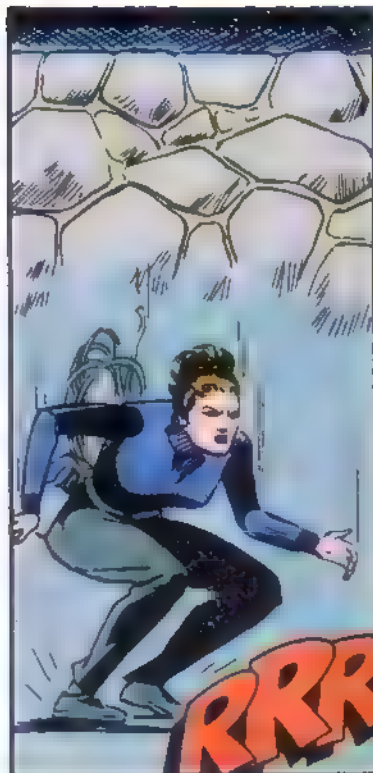
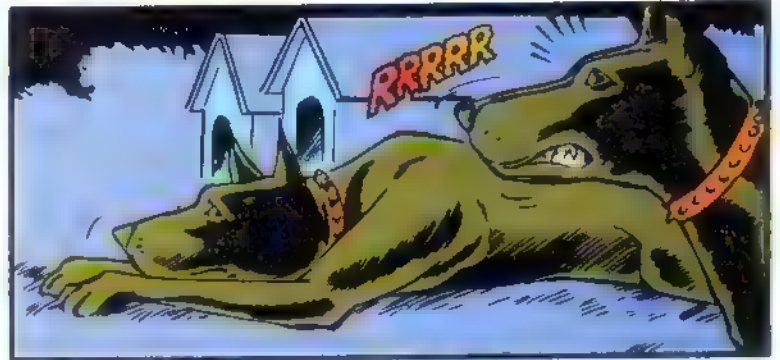
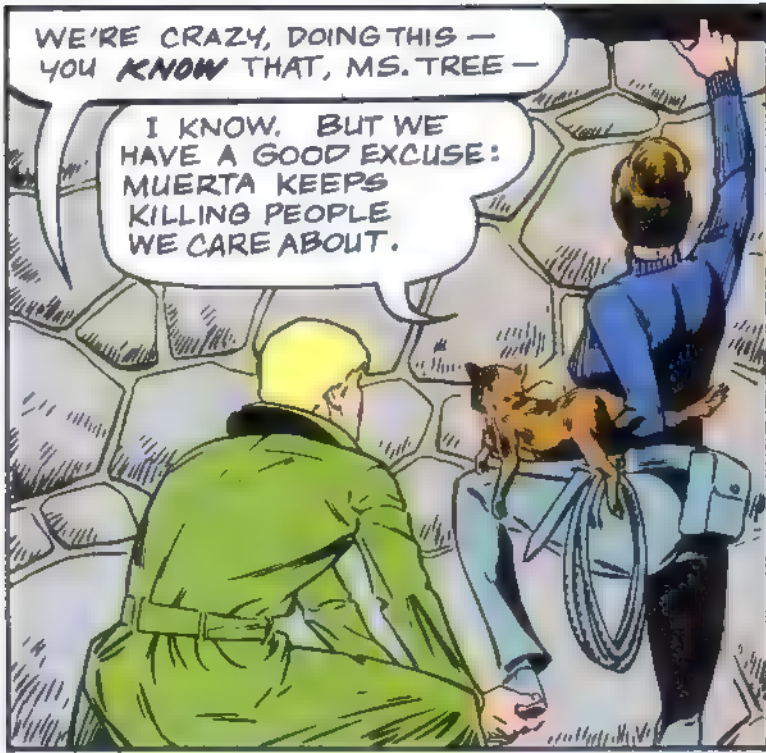
YEAH — BUT I TRIPLED MY AFTERSHAVE JUST IN CASE.

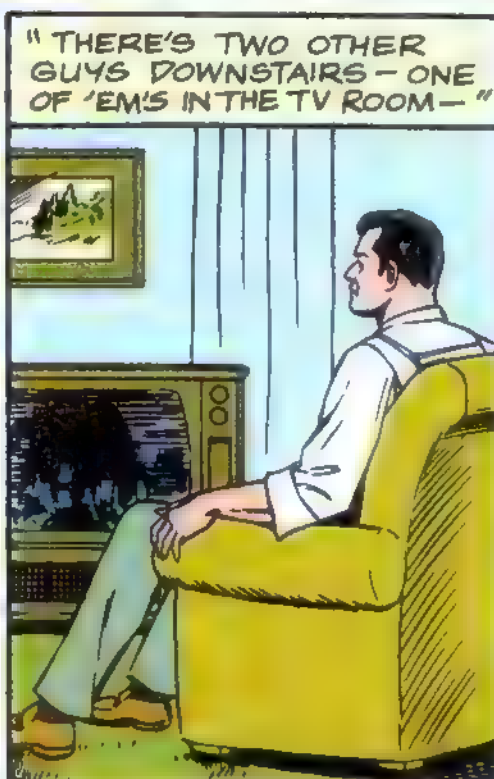
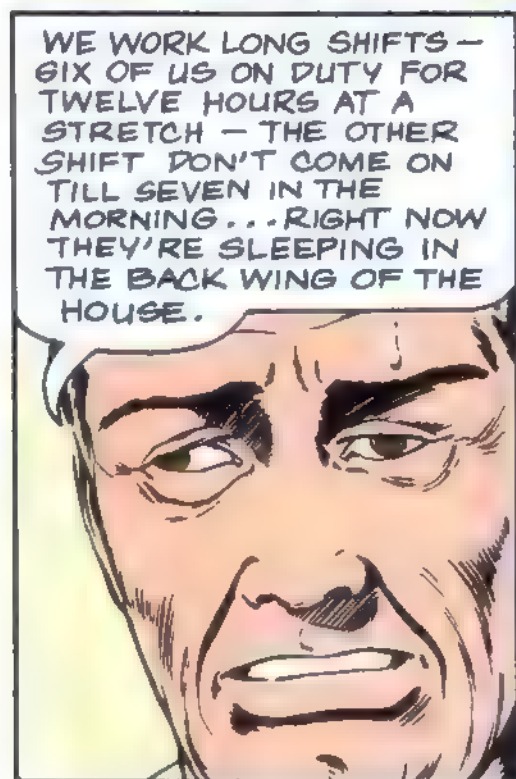
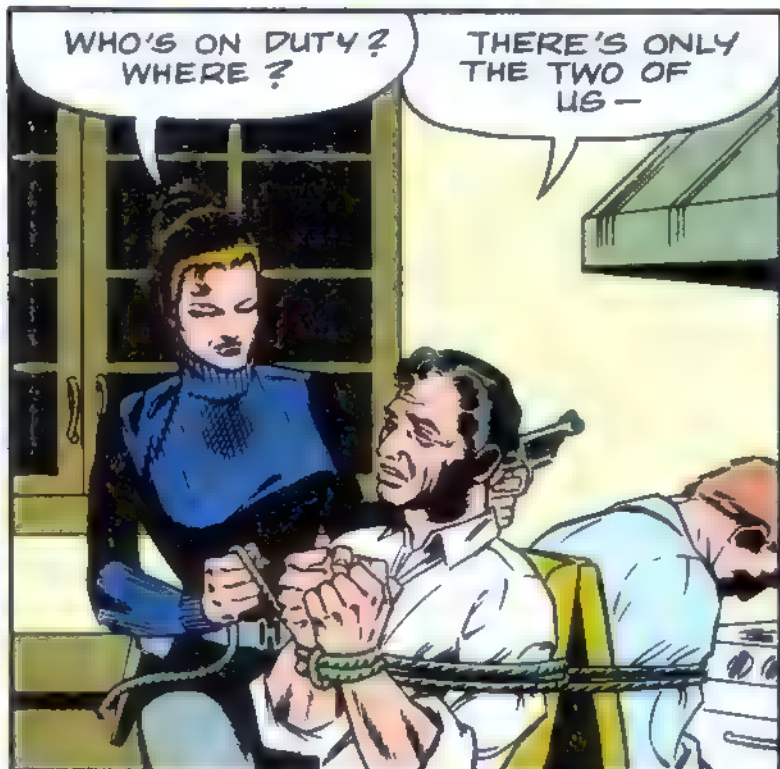
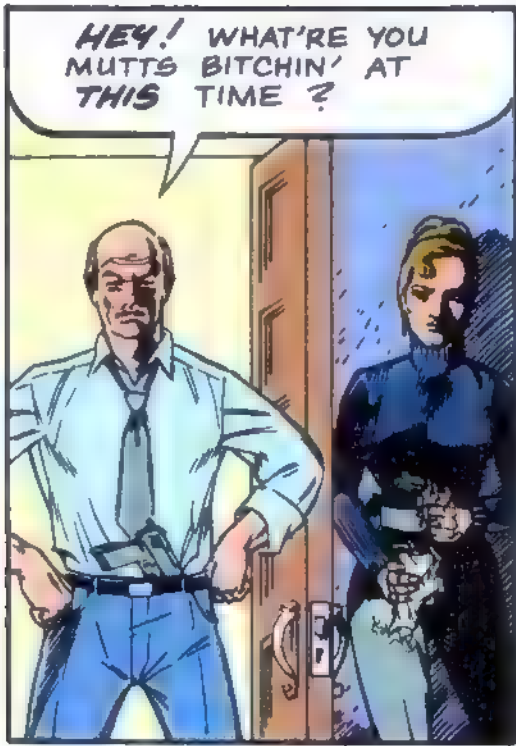
I NOTICED.

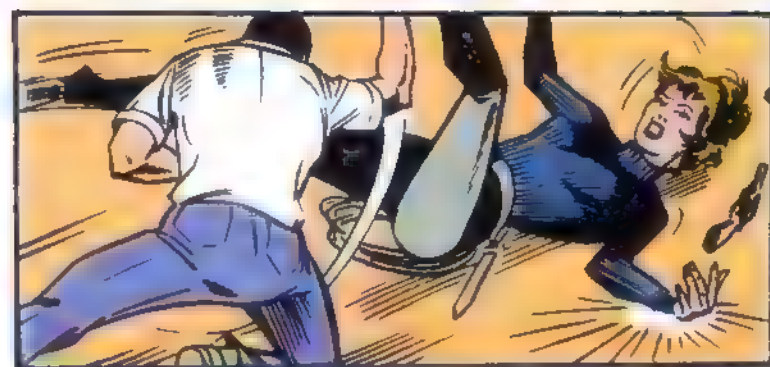
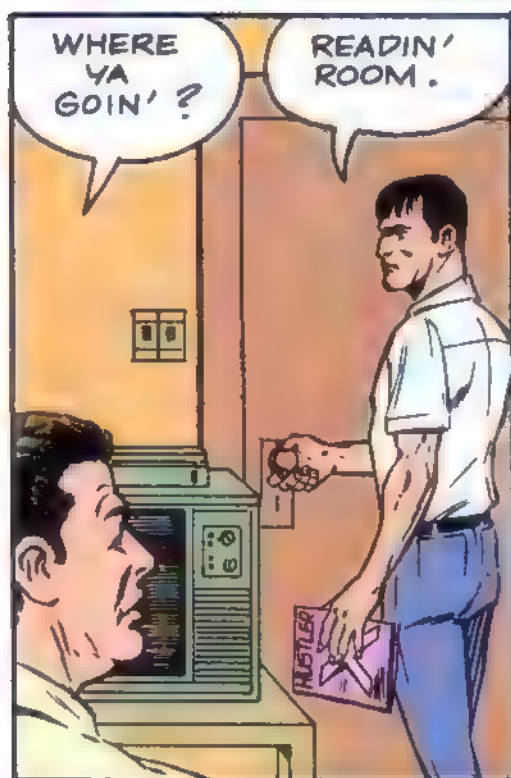
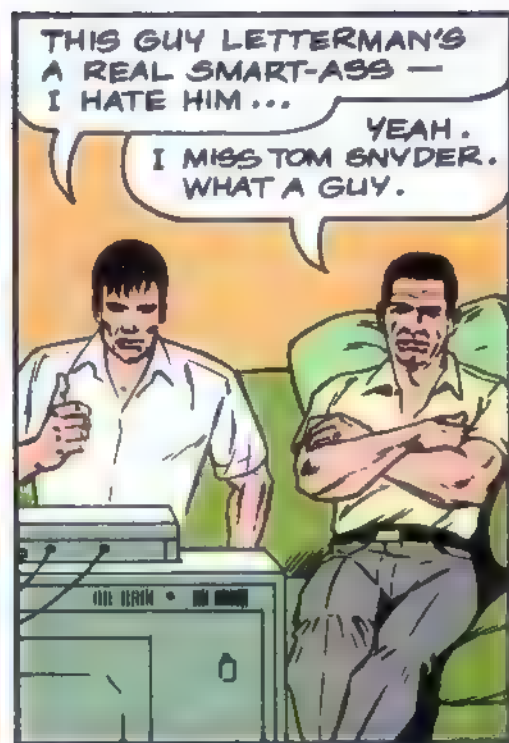
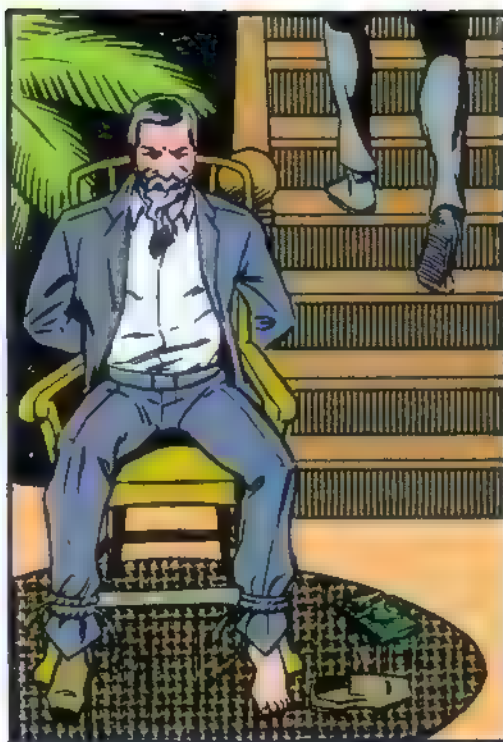
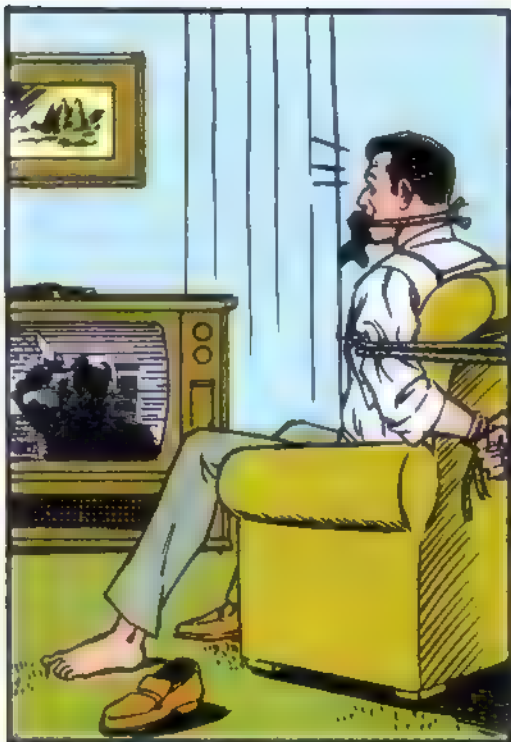
BE MY GUEST AND ENJOY THE FRAGRANCE — JUST DON'T BREATHE IN ANY OF THIS ...

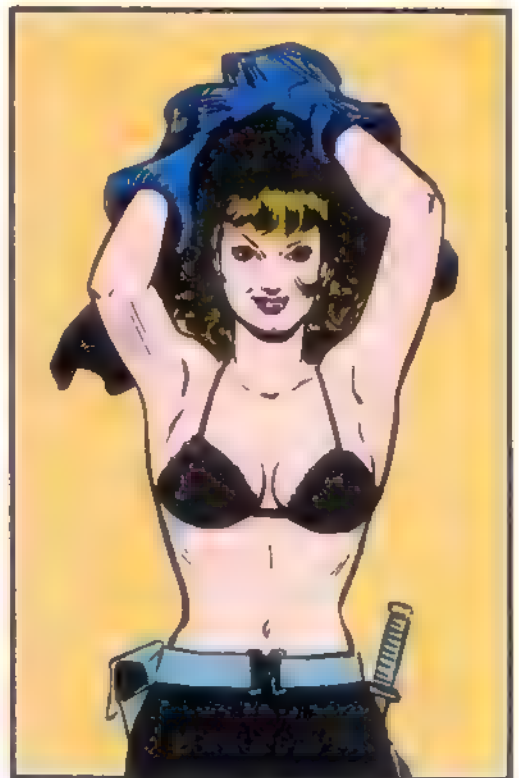
THOSE ARE CLOTHS PRE-SOAKED IN CHLOROFORM — DON'T WANT YOU GOING AROUND KILLING PEOPLE UNNECESSARILY, MS. TREE —

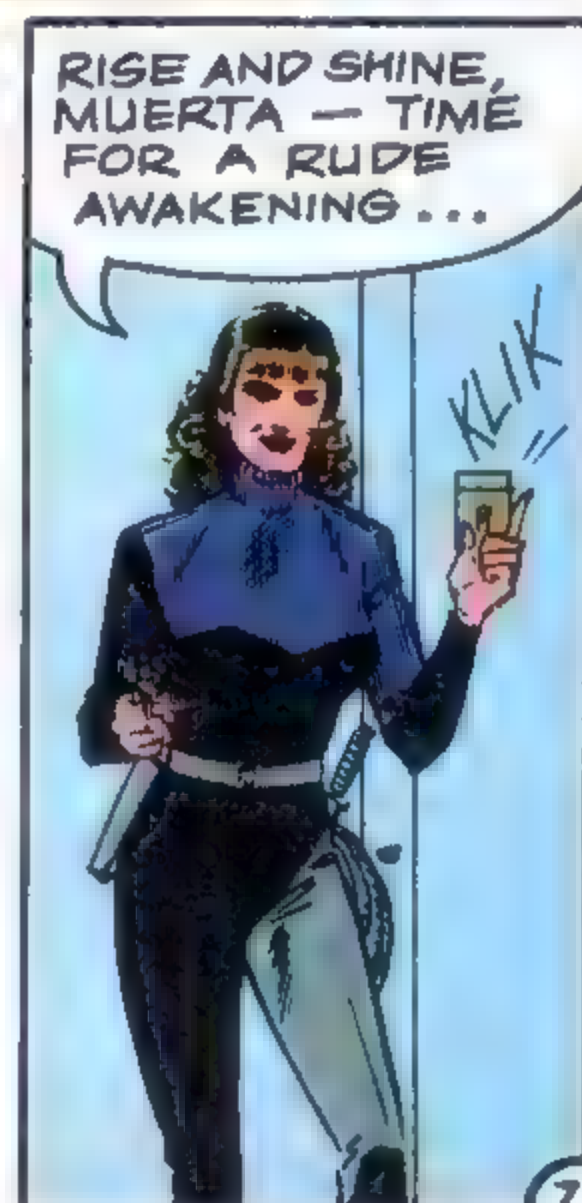
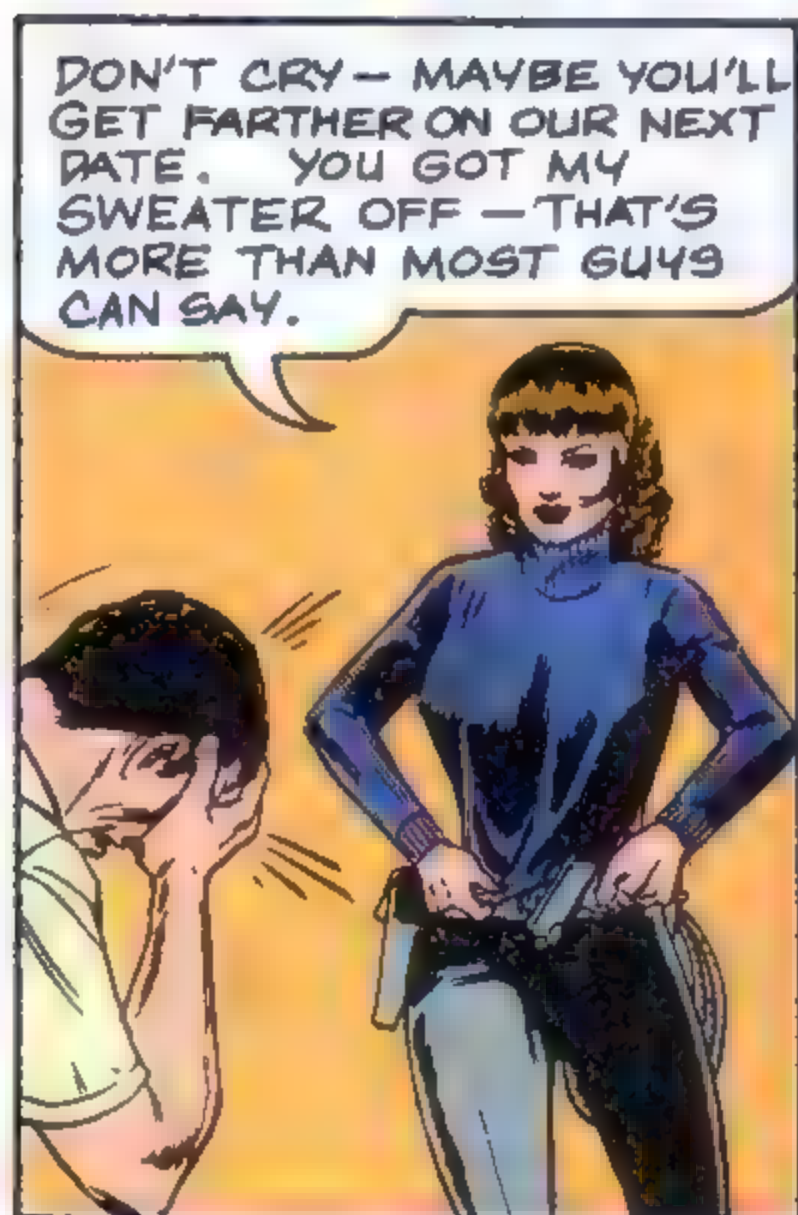
THOUGHTFUL.

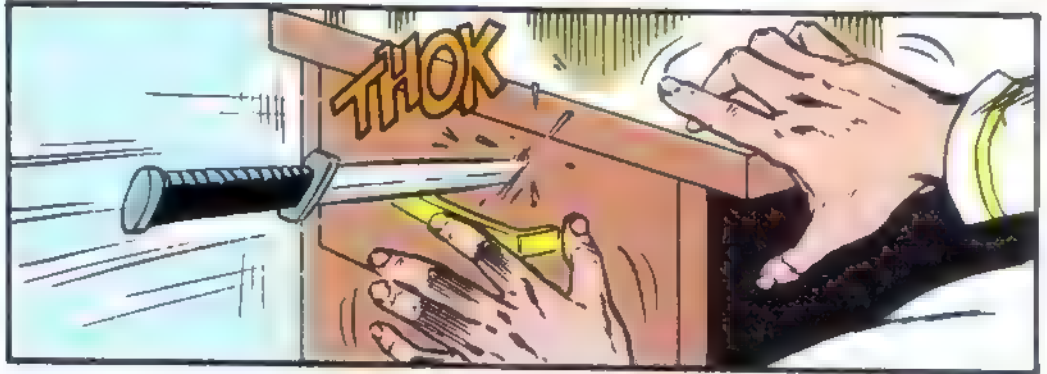
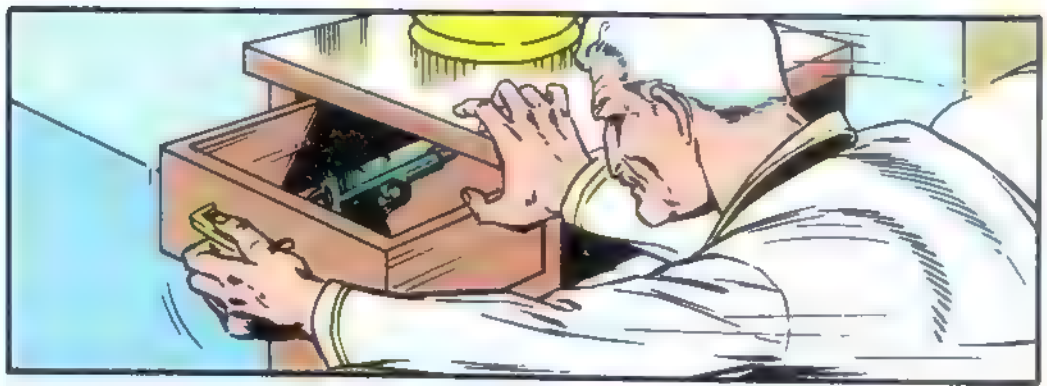
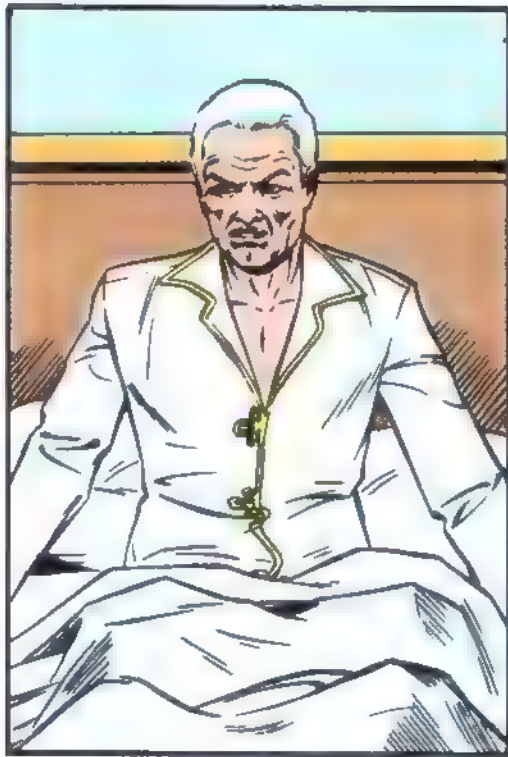








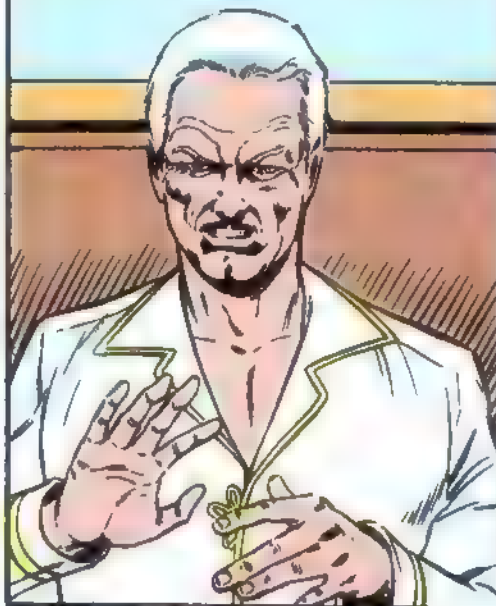




I'D LOVE AN EXCUSE TO FINISH THIS — GOT ANY OTHER GUNS STASHED? LIKE ROCKY SAYS — GO FOR IT.



YOU'RE A MADWOMAN.



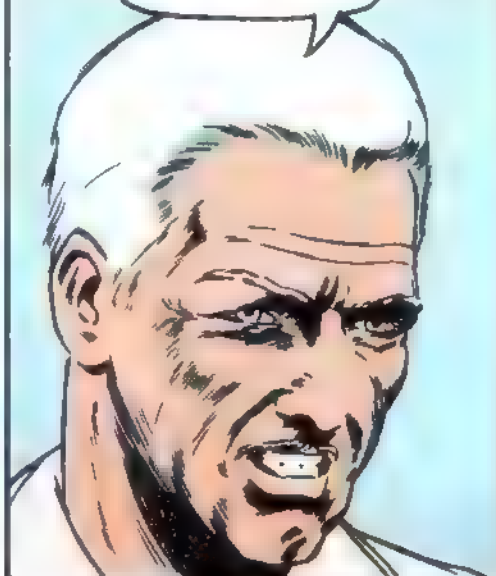
RIGHT! AND DON'T YOU FORGET IT. NOW, GET OUT OF BED.



I'M TIRED OF YOU KILLING THE PEOPLE IN MY LIFE. I'VE BEEN COMPLACENT LONG ENOUGH — IT'S TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT YOU.

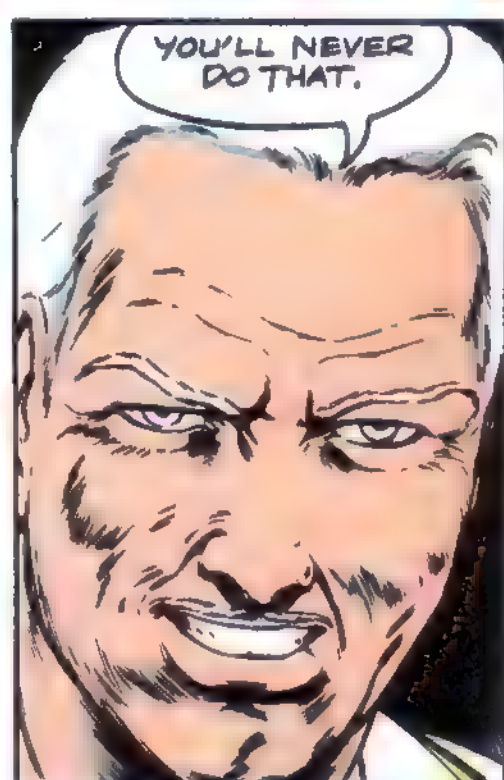
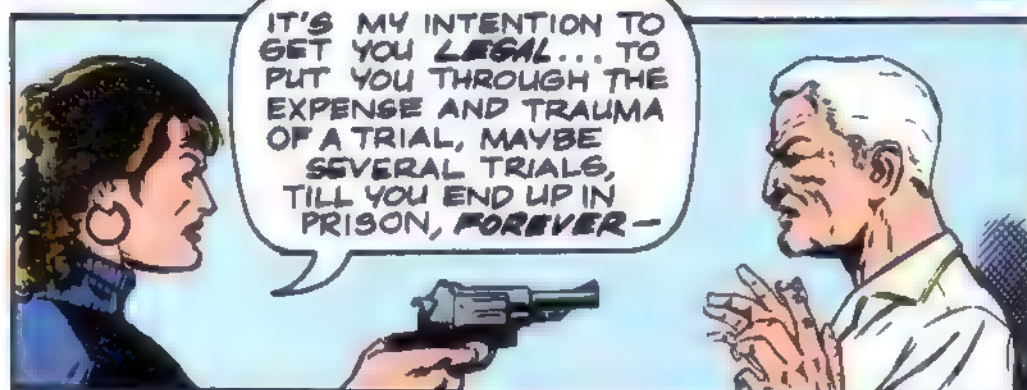
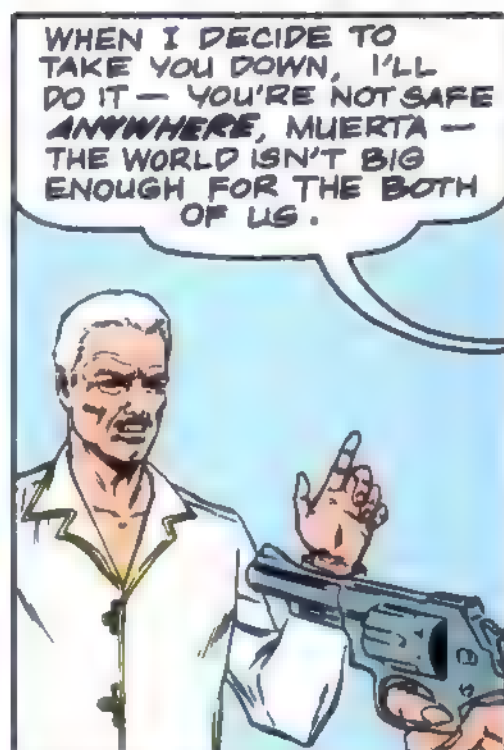
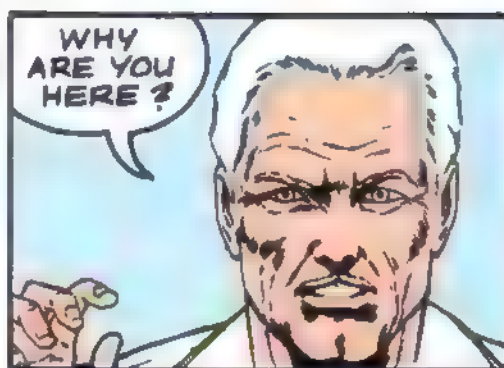


YOU'VE BROKEN-AND-ENTERED — UNDOUBTEDLY ASSAULTED MY PEOPLE — YOU'LL GO TO JAIL FOR THIS...



ONLY IF I KILL YOU. YOU WON'T REPORT ANY OF THIS IF I JUST WALK AWAY — JUST LIKE I DIDN'T REPORT IT WHEN YOU SENT AN UNINVITED GUEST INTO MY BOUDOIR.







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and Peter Ledger

a three-part story beginning in ECLIPSE MONTHLY no. 6

